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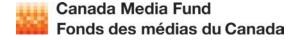




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Cover Our cover sports an ad for eOne Family's new 39 x half-hour action-comedy toon Zac Storm, while our inside editorial cover offers a first look at new Cirque du Soleil/Saban Brands preschool series Luna Petunia.

## **ANIMATED IN IRELAND**



# IRELAND'S NEW 32% TAX CREDIT FOR FILM & TELEVISION ANIMATION

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#### **Editorial**

### Playtime>PowerPoint

While giving a final read to the Contents page today, I came to the realization that if I didn't love googly eyes like I do, I probably would have left this job long ago. (You'll see when you get there.) Anyway, being involved in the kids business pretty much requires an appreciation and willingness to engage with playful and goofy things of the googly-eyed variety.



And according to some reports, its move to throw over playtime for PowerPoint is part of the reason the world's biggest toymaker, Mattel, finds itself in its current position.

By the time you read this, the news of Brian Stockton's abrupt departure and Mattel's 7% decline in revenues and startling 55% drop in profits for 2014 will be well-travelled. Of course,

there are other circumstances driving the company's five consecutive quarters of decreasing sales like the plunging US birthrate that's affecting preschool-focused Fisher-Price's sales, the rise of the iPad as a chief competitor to toys for kids' attention, and Barbie's waning appeal with this generation of kids and parents. However, it's also been noted, primarily in a series of articles in The Wall Street Journal, that Mattel under Brian Stockton became mired in "a culture that valued endless meetings and long PowerPoint presentations" and had lost its way creatively—in other words, it had forgotten how to play.

The WSJ's "Floundering Mattel Tries to Make Things Fun Again" (December 22), describes an environment where employees would spend weeks putting together presentations with 100 slides or more, and where executives were so overwhelmed with meetings that they would put placeholder appointments on their calendars so they could have uninterrupted chunks of time in which to get work done. Just weeks before his resignation, Stockton reportedly took significant measures to put Mattel back on course. Notably, he mandated that meetings could only be called for a specific purpose. He also launched an internal division called the Toy Box, designated as Mattel's new creative hub where the next generation of toys would come from.

Stockton won't be around to see if the changes—particularly his emphasis on reenergizing the company's creativity and making it fun again—will have an impact. And given that toy development and tooling isn't exactly a speedy process, it will be awhile before the wider industry sees the results. But if the current condition Mattel finds itself in shows the kids business nothing else, it underscores how important it is to appreciate and participate in play, to recognize the imaginative and creative headspace shared by all kids, and then figure out how to harness it all to entertain them.

And with that in mind, I look forward to seeing many of you at the first Kidscreen Summit in Miami. I'm sure you'll make time for play!

Cheers.

Lana

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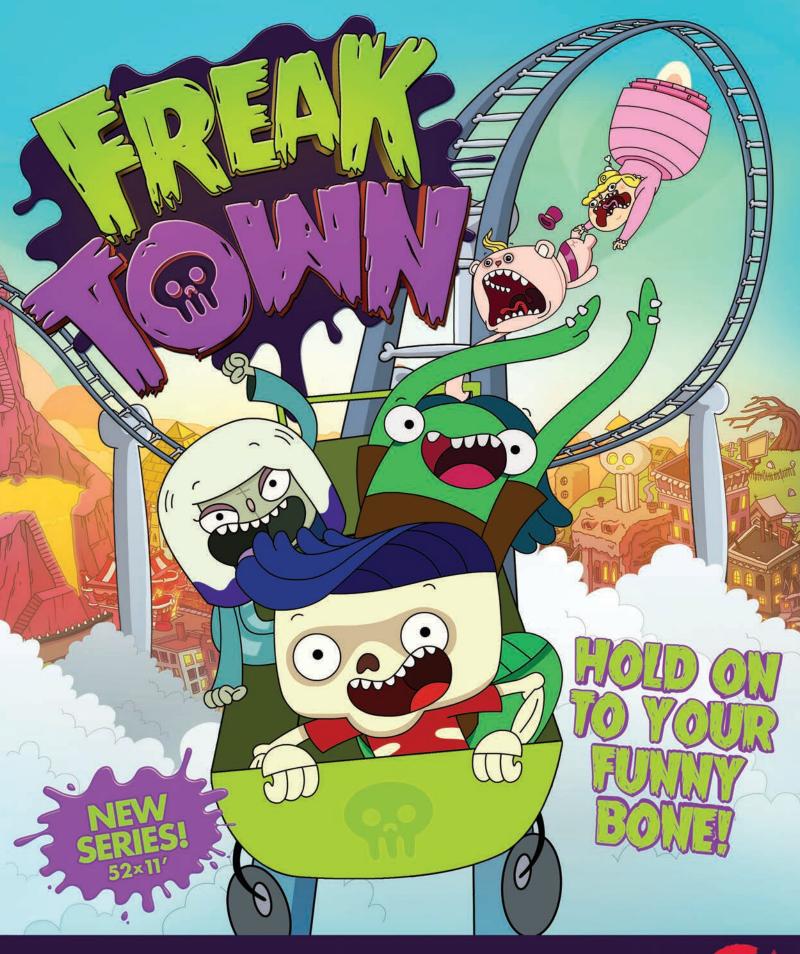
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To say it's been a rough ride lately for Mattel would be the understatement of the year—make that the last five quarters. The effects of slumping Barbie sales, losing the Disney doll license to Hasbro and being surpassed by LEGO as the world's most valuable toymaker have rippled through the company all the way to the top. With Q4 revenue down 6% to US\$1.99 billion from 2013, CEO Bryan Stockton resigned in late January after two years at the helm and 15 with the company. Long-time board member Christopher Sinclair has taken over in the interim. Will Mattel tap one of its own execs—perhaps newly promoted chief brands officer Richard Dickson, or chief commercial officer Tim Kilpin—to right the ship in 2015?, or will it look outside the company? If only Barbie had a crystal ball...





#### **DreamWorks** downsizes

Following a string of big-budget, underperforming features, DreamWorks Animation took action with a massive restructure. It slashed 500 jobs, closed PDI/DreamWorks studio and reduced its film slate. While DWA has successfully diversified across TV and digital platforms, CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg says he lost sight of the core business. A return to profitability won't be easy, and is selling really an option after two failed attempts made late last year?



#### video?

Now that Twitter and Snapchat are the latest to join YouTube, Vine, Instagram and Facebook as video and media hubs, the competition among social networks to monetize large user bases and connect brands to younger audiences is heating up in a big way. But as more companies clamor for original, exclusive content and sign new partners, there's room to wonder whether or not the results will be sticky enough to capture this super-served demo.



#### **Target misses bullseve**

We saw it coming, but it's gotta sting. Two years after venturing into the Great White North, Target is closing its doors in Canada. The retailer is in the process of shuttering all 133 locations, leaving some 17,000 people out of work. But Target's demise also eliminates a siginificant toy retailer. Now it's up to competitor Toys 'R' Us Canada to seize the day and pick up the slack.



#### Making it official

It's clear that public broadcasters like PBS KIDS have caught on to the benefits of having a stronger (and official) presence on YouTube. The pubcaster's PBS KIDSbranded channel launched in late January with hundreds of video clips from TV shows and full eps of web-original series. With more kids going digital first, let's chalk one up for discoverability.

To keep up with the news as it happens, check out **Kidscreen.com** daily.



Although people assumed she would become a teacher, English grad **Tara Sorensen** entered the kids biz instead, first in publishing before moving on to production roles and liberation at Amazon

# Keeping an ear to the ground

**The gig** Head of kids programming for Amazon Studios, overseeing the development and production of Amazon's original children's content

**Stepping stones** Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, Tara Sorensen was a happy kid with a big extended family, a twin sister and an obsession for children's books, especially ones by American author Shel Silverstein. After high school, she moved west and attended the University of Southern California, graduating in 1993 with a B.A. in English Literature and a minor in Cinema and Television. Though not exactly sure what to do with her life, she recognized that a job in publishing might be a good start. Using her television studies and her love of kids lit to her advantage, Sorensen lucked into an editorial assistant role in the publishing group at New York's Children's Television Workshop (now Sesame Workshop). A year later she moved back to L.A., but a lack of publishing jobs there made her consider a move into kids TV.

**Changing course** Sorensen's career in television began at Nelvana as former president Toper Taylor's assistant. "He was a USC grad, too, but seemed more obsessed with my undergraduate degree, and the shared experience of bleeding cardinal and gold, than my skills and experience from CTW. But it worked to my advantage," says Sorensen. She was eventually promoted to manager of development, and worked on a number of hit series, including *Rolie Polie Olie* and *Franklin the Turtle*. After Nelvana, she joined Sony Pictures Family Entertainment as VP of development. "I worked there for six years and often refer to them as 'the golden years' because Sony had more shows on Kids' WB! than Warner Bros. Animation did," she says.



Buddy: Tech Detective is part of Amazon's first pilot season of 2015

When Sony became less reliant on family features, Sorensen joined Nat Geo Kids to focus on co-productions. During her nine years with the company, she was instrumental in getting *Toot & Puddle* to air for Nick Jr., but the industry was shifting.

"It was becoming harder to launch shows in a market that was so vertically integrated. This was the biggest challenge for me. I questioned how indie producers would be able to function," she says. "I also had two kids at this point and could see how they were consuming media in a different way."

**Enter Amazon** When Amazon Studios director Roy Price came knocking with an opportunity to be part of a new

distribution model for kids content, Sorensen knew it was the change she needed and she hasn't looked back. "We've been producing at a really wonderful, chaotic pace. There is so much autonomy that Roy, and Amazon as a whole, gives me. It's been very liberating," she says.

So what makes a great leader in the industry? Sorensen says it boils down to communication. "You need to be a great listener, not just to the needs of the parents, but to the needs of the kids who consume the content, and the creators, too."—Jeremy Dickson

#### Obsessed

What can't you get enough of right now?



Beth Stevenson

Founder, Brain Power Studio

In our house there are tons of **Paddingtons**. Some old and new, some that have been brought back from London—and even one sewed for me by my mom. Watching the lovely new movie this year meant so much to see such great homage to this bear. The obsession continues.



Vince Commisso

President and CEO, 9 Story Media Group

There are three things I'm currently obsessed with—
Showtime crime drama Ray Donovan, military bootcamp workouts, and the state of current world politics. Not necessarily in that order of course!



**Richard Goldsmith** 

EVP of global distribution and international consumer products,
The lim Henson Company

I am obsessed with collecting **television memorabilia**. My collection features props and wardrobe from classic series like M\*A\*S\*H to newer hits like Fargo.



## **Channel building**



Kidscreen Summit keynote speaker and YouTube head of family Malik Ducard talks kids and family content trends, partnerships and the growth of the video giant's channels business hardly a secret that the world's largest video site is assuming an almost unprecedented role in the lives of kids and families around the globe, despite the fact that it's technically restricted for under 13s. But with Google's announcement that it's revamping several of its products for kids under 12, including YouTube, having the video giant's global head of family and

vamping several of its products for kids under 12, including YouTube, having the video giant's global head of family and learning Malik Ducard deliver the keynote address at Kidscreen Summit 2015 couldn't be more timely. Kidscreen's editor and content director Lana Castleman got a chance to chat with Ducard before the big day about the direction of YouTube's content partnership program, trends to watch in the kids space, and even the fate of internet cats.

#### What are you looking to accomplish right now?

The core of my job is working with great partners who are creating content and have a vision to bring online. One of the things I love about YouTube, specifically, is that there is this diversity of voices and creators, including everyone from longstanding creators like Sesame Workshop to creators who have leveraged the platform as a first window to highlight their voices. So you have folks like Hank Green, for example, who has two million subscriptions to a channel all about science. At the same time, you have the Sesame Street channel with well over a million subscribers, and we've also done some new content with them—namely *The Furchester Hotel*.

#### Making The Furchester Hotel available globally on YouTube first marked quite a change...

We love working with Sesame Workshop, and it's an awesome show. We found them to be really innovative and forward-thinking. With YouTube, it's the partners that are in the front—they really get to build out their own IP and a piece of real estate on the site to attract and retain an audience. In the case of Sesame, they have more than a million subscribers. So when they release a new show like *The Furchester*, or even a new clip, they have more than a million people who get a direct notification/alert that there's new content available.

#### How do you help your partners?

We do a couple things. We have teams that are positioned to walk partners through best practices. We share insights and give advice and feedback around channel-building. We're also constantly adding new features and functionality. Over time, YouTube has evolved—it now lives across screens, mobile, TV, web and computer. In fact, more than 50% of viewing now happens on mobile devices. We've worked really hard to make YouTube a place where partners can build their brands and extend their reach.

#### What's the first step for content producers to get in touch with your team?

Reach out to us. There are a number of ways. You can find us at the events we attend. We've also created an online doc specific to family channels on YouTube with the top 10 to 15 best practices and how to get started.

#### What trends are bubbling up in kids and family?

This is an umbrella trend, but we're seeing real growth in kids and family consumption on YouTube. When you look at top-10 channels on YouTube, you see many unboxing channels, which are family-oriented, Stampylongnose and other Minecraft channels. Engagement is another big one. YouTube's audience see themselves as participants, whether it's being a creator, a subscriber, or a commenter. We're also seeing this healthy growth on the education/enrichment side of things. In fact, the consumption of educational content is now double that of pet-video consumption on YouTube. So more people are watching this type of content than they are the content originally associated with the site.

#### So are you saying internet cat antics aren't popular anymore?

There will always be a place for them, but now there's a big space for educational and enriching video.

#### What about narrative content? What kind of role do you see for it on YouTube?

I think that there's a great place for narrative. It means different things. Fiction, non-fiction and even musical narrative—a lot of great storytelling done through nursery rhymes, which is another large category for us right now. There is a big place for storytelling on YouTube. I think it follows the basic premise, where the eyeballs go, so goes the storytelling—so definitely online and definitely on YouTube.

#### Is there an appetite for long-form content now?

We're finding people are watching longer pieces of content and that session times are getting longer. We happen to be in a unique space in kids and family where the content is malleable and the storytelling can be the most modular. There's a lot of short-form consumption, but we're seeing growth with long form. —Lana Castleman

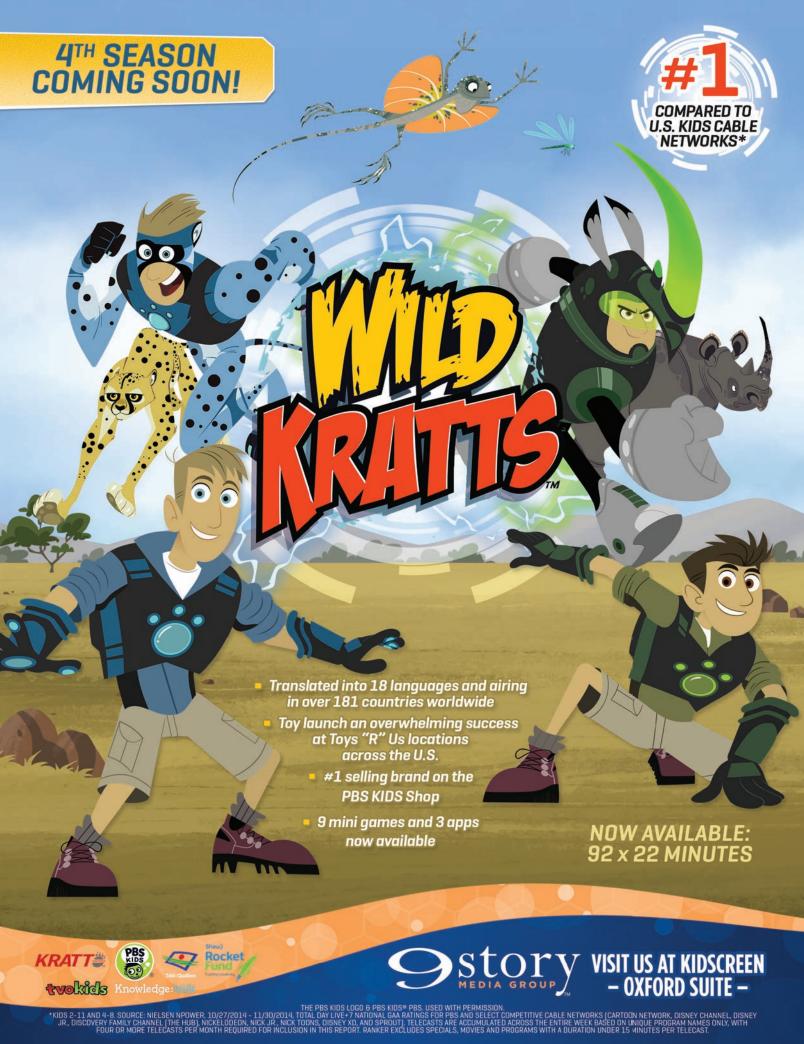




Photo by Seth Olenick

# Channelling his inner-child

Weird Al Yankovic and Henson team up for series based on his bestselling books est-known for parodying hit songs over the past 30-odd years, musician Weird Al Yankovic's next gig is working on an animated series based on his children's books, which will see him spoofing his younger self—well, sort of.

The upcoming series is based on Yankovic's books, New York Times Bestseller *When I Grow Up* and *My New Teacher and Me!*, which both star an imaginative eight-year-old boy named Billy. Helping to transpose Billy from print to television is producer The Jim Henson Company. While still in the very early conceptual stages, the yet-to-be-named series will consist of 11-minute episodes that take place primarily in a school setting.

"Billy is more like the kid I wish I could have been at that age," says Yankovic. "I was pretty shy and withdrawn as a child," admits the three-time Grammy Award winner. "Billy's got a huge personality," he adds. "He's fearless, he's extremely imaginative and creative. He's empowered by his weirdness—I might go as far as to say he is an alter ego."

Yankovic's love of Shel Silverstein's rhyming style inspired his writing. "At least that's what I was attempting to do," he chuckles. "I just kind of drew on my knowledge and my love for children's literature and gave it my best shot."

As creator and executive producer, Yankovic will be hands-on with the new series. And there's a good chance he'll loan his voice to one of the characters, too. "I certainly would like to try to wedge my way into my own show," he laughs. "But I'm not exactly sure who it would be at this point."

The series will target four- to seven-year-olds, but Yankovic hopes it will appeal to a much broader audience. "I think the best children's entertainment can be enjoyed equally by people of all ages," he contends.

And so does The Jim Henson Company, according to its longtime Weird Al fan and EVP of children's entertainment, Halle Stanford. "What I love about Billy is he reminds me of everybody here at Henson. Kind of the way we all think outside the box and are always challenging ideas," she says. She adds that the books have a very Henson-y feel. "If you imagine Jim Henson as a little boy and you look at Billy, you think 'Yup, there probably were some similarities!"

Wes Hargis's illustrations from the books will be used as inspiration for the animated look-and-feel of the production. And as with any Weird Al project, you can bet there will be plenty of humor, music and mixed-media involved. Henson's goal is to deliver the series for fall 2016.

For now, Stanford and her colleagues are content to enjoy the creative journey, led by a man who is continually evolving and rousing generation after generation to use their imaginations. "What I have discovered since starting to work with Al is how many people he inspired in some way, either as a kid or a songwriter," says Stanford about her son's idol. —Patrick Callan

The lightning round... with Weird Al Yankovic



FAVORITE APP Whitagram

FAVORITE SONG

"Defying Gravity" (from the musical Wicked)

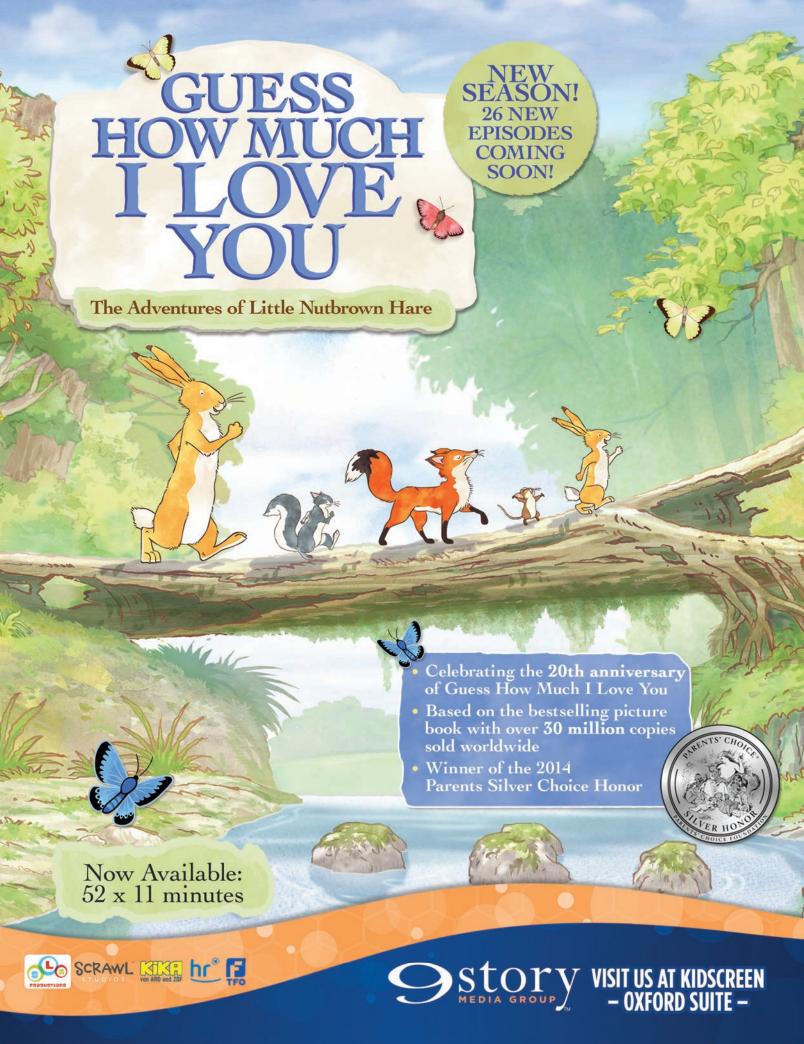
song HE WISHES HE HAD PARODIED "Ice Ice Baby"

**BIGGEST WORD CRIME** 

I don't have any problem ending a sentence with a preposition.

**FAVORITE CARTOON CHARACTER**Marvin the Martian

**FAVORITE BREAKFAST FOOD**Panda Puffs





Kiva Can Do! producer Kavaleer believes the new 32% tax-break rate will boost Ireland's already high animation standards reland's newly bolstered film and TV tax incentive for TV drama and animation, feature films and creative factual programs is now worth a possible 32% (up from 28%) of eligible Irish expenditure. Section 481 also now makes all individual cast and crew working

"We've raised about 95% of the fin from Telefilm Canada, the Irish Film Stronach Foundation and Movie Cen will begin in May or June. Nearly 50 completed in Ireland, a little less th

in Ireland, regardless of nationality, eligible for the credit. So, it's no wonder that animation producers in the country have more reasons to celebrate an already strong and growing industry.

For Cartoon Saloon CEO Paul Young, the changes to the tax credit, which went into effect on January 1 and expire December  $31,\,2020$ , will bring a number of positives. Primarily he's betting on the promise of more co-production work with leading international animation companies, and an improved ability for Irish studios to own or have a stake in their IPs.

"Animation is a very co-pro-driven business, so we're looking forward to meeting all of our co-pro friends and telling them how much more we can help, if they have a good project," says Young. "The changes will also help build the industry on the pillars of IP ownership and improve long-term sustainability for Irish companies."

Cartoon Saloon's first project to take advantage of the new tax break is *The Breadwinner*, a US\$10-million animated feature film being co-produced with Toronto, Canada's Aircraft Pictures. The movie, based on Canadian author Deborah Ellis's acclaimed children's novel of the same name, tells the story of an 11-year-old girl living under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

"We've raised about 95% of the financing with support from Telefilm Canada, the Irish Film Board, The Belinda Stronach Foundation and Movie Central, and production will begin in May or June. Nearly 50% of the film will be completed in Ireland, a little less than 50% in Canada, and a small portion in Luxembourg," says Young, whose Kilkenny-based studio recently earned a Best Animated Feature Oscar nom for its latest film *Song of the Sea*.

Another big change to the scheme, says Irish Film Board CEO James Hickey, is that it is now a direct payment. "The credit is now paid out directly by the Irish government. Under the old system, investors expected a return on their investment, and part of the tax benefit that was available went to the investors, rather than to the production," Hickey says. "It's a good-news story for the industry, but also a reasonably good-news story for the Irish Government. It will save a certain amount of money on the cost of every Euro of eligible expenditure in Ireland."

Gary Timpson, MD of Dublin-based Kavaleer Productions (*Kiva Can Do!*, *Boj*, *Wildernuts*), says the new incentive will help boost the already high standards for animation production in Ireland. "If top off-shore talent comes in that up-and-coming directors and producers in Ireland can learn from, it's a win-win for everybody," says Timpson. "And because studios from the US and the UK can come to us to get larger portions of work produced here, it will generate a necessity for more training. It will raise the quality of the animators in Ireland." –Jeremy Dickson



#### **Hot**Stuff

#### **Multi-skilled masters**

#### Welsh prodco **Cloth Cat Animation** is ready to pounce on the competition

**Who** In just three years, Cardiff-based studio Cloth Cat Animation has grown into one of the largest and most multi-talented animation production companies in Wales. It has amassed a client list of broadcast and co-production partners including Disney, Cartoon Network, CBeebies, S4C, Kavaleer Productions, Hoho Entertainment and Pesky Animation.

Leveraging Wales's rich history of animation, diverse locations, skilled visual effects workforce, and favorable government tax break for productions, the company seized the opportunity in 2011. It quickly got to work on third-party projects like commercials, games and web content, and coproducing TV series. Cloth Cat's MD John Rennie says a big reason for the studio's success is that it doesn't subscribe to one particular animation style, and can adapt to any project, from development to delivery, quickly and efficiently under one roof.

"Our biggest opportunity is we're skilled in many areas. We excel in CelAction 2D, but also provide expertise in 3D digital animation, storyboarding, design, motion graphics and editing," Rennie says.

He adds that Cloth Cat's two sister companies, Bait Studio (visual effects) and Thud Media (interactive), have also helped attract high-profile clients to invest in its development projects.

**The work** After completing its first co-production, hybrid series *Ha Ha Hairies* with Adastra Creative, Cloth Cat expanded into 2D animation with *Boj*, a co-pro with UK-based Pesky and Ireland's Kavaleer. The comedy series debuted on CBeebies in May 2014 and it has since been picked up internationally by broadcasters including Sprout (US), ABC (Australia) and France 5.

The company also partnered with Kavaleer on its new preschool series *Wildernuts*, and produced visual effects for seasons four and five of CBeebies' hit live-action/CG-animated series *Grandpa In My Pocket*.

To best manage its growing pipeline, Rennie says the studio has integrated a VFX-based production management system. "We've taken a VFX pipeline that is used on big films and applied it to animation," he says. "We use an online database cloud system called FTrack to track all of our projects, but also to render everything we do and put it back into a live edit."

As Cloth Cat advances technically, the studio is also giving back to the local industry by offering in-house training in a number of areas, including 2D production. "We're looking to ensure that Wales has a highly skilled crew base that we can call on," he says.

"We also want to forge new relationships with creators and broadcasters and challenge ourselves with new technologies. That's what keeps it fun for us."

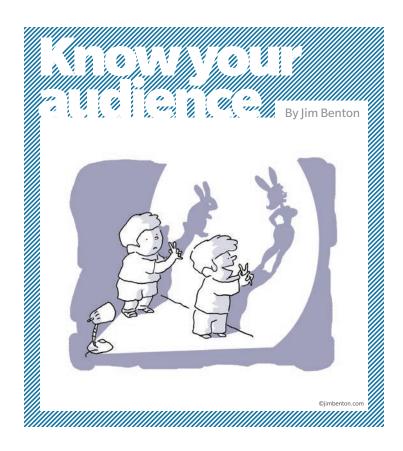
**Coming up** Cloth Cat is currently working on 52 x 11-minute 2D preschool series *Toot the Tiny Tugboat*, a co-pro with UK-based partners Lupus Films and indie Boom Kids that airs on Channel 5's



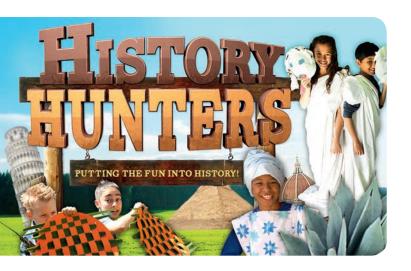
Cloth Cat is helping to bring beloved British characters Mole, Rat and Toad back to the small screen in new reboot Wind in the Willows: Mole of Mole End

Milkshake block and S4C (Wales). A new TV reboot Wind in the Willows: Mole of Mole End is also underway with Hoho Entertainment and Martin Gates Productions. "We hope it will be a cornerstone project for us. We're working on scripts, a bible and a promo for Kidscreen Summit," says Rennie.

"Additionally, we have a new original series in development entitled *Lunar Lodge*, and we plan to expand beyond the preschool demo as we grow." –Jeremy Dickson



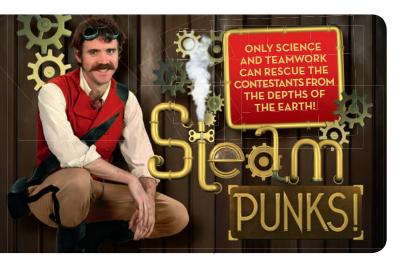
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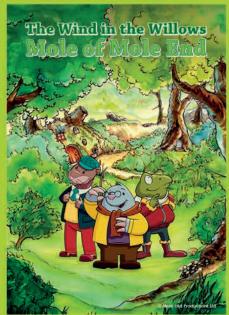




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MCC Media

Midnight Oil Productions

Night Zookeeper

Platypus Research

Plug-in Media Pluto Entertainments

Serious Lunch

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Walker Books/ Walker Productions

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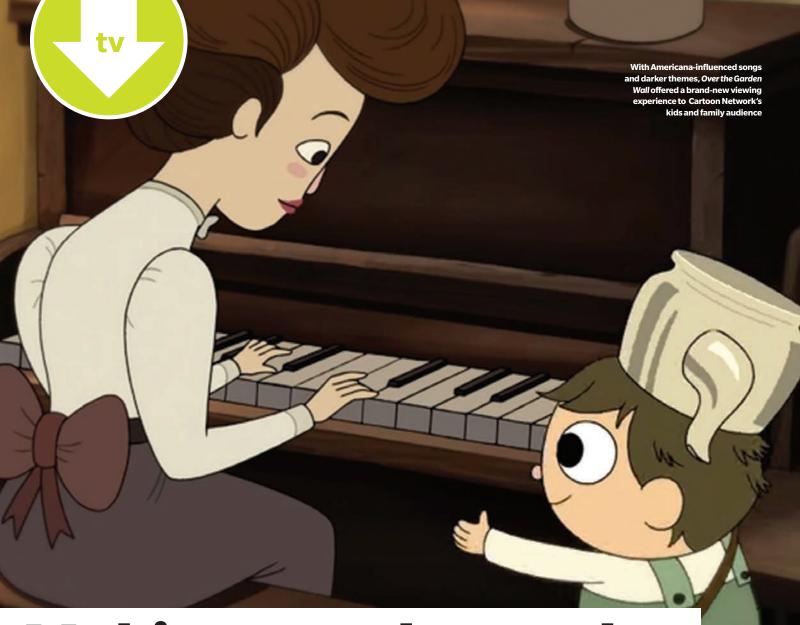






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Making couch-worthy moments its more than 20-year history, Cartoon Network has proven its more than 20-year history.

Cartoon
Network
breaks new
ground with
first-ever
miniseries
Over the
Garden Wall

BY JEREMY DICKSON

its more than 20-year history, Cartoon Network has proven it's not afraid to take calculated risks by launching incredibly original programming like *Adventure Time* and *Steven Universe*. But this past fall the studio unveiled a new project unlike anything it's made before.

Over five consecutive nights from November 3 to 7, the US network aired its very first miniseries, an original 10 x 11-minute comedy/fantasy toon called *Over the Garden Wall* from the former creative director of *Adventure Time*, Patrick McHale.

The pre-holiday, primetime animated event for kids and families is based on an acclaimed short film McHale made for Cartoon Network in 2011 entitled Tome of the Unknown. It follows the adventures of two brothers, Wirt and Greg, who find themselves trapped in a strange forest world and must find their way home.

With dark undertones, folk art inspiration and a soundtrack of Americana-influenced original songs by L.A.-based band The Petrojvic Blasting Company, *Over the Garden Wall* creates a mood and experience designed to evoke feelings of nostalgia in older audiences raised on classic children's storybooks of the 1800s and timeless fairytales. It also features an all-star voice cast led by Elijah Wood (Lord of the Rings trilogy) as Wirt and Collin Dean (*The War At Home*) as Greg, plus enough quirky humor and adventure to satisfy today's kids.



The miniseries' unique style even carried over to the show's promotional materials, which included a "Read and Listen" storybook with an accompanying 45-inch vinyl record.

Cartoon Network CMO Michael Ouweleen says the studio took a chance with the production, but felt secure enough in McHale's vision that it didn't feel completely reckless. "It felt novel and that's when we are at our best," he says.

From the moment McHale first pitched part of a story-board sporting the same red cone hat and blue cape worn by protagonist Wirt, Ouweleen knew the project was special. "The texture of the storyboard alone was so different from anything else on the wall at the time," he says.

Although the network didn't know exactly what to do with the project at first, McHale worked closely with Cartoon Network's chief content officer Rob Sorcher to shape the concept.

"Even though it was a weird project, Cartoon Network was very supportive," says McHale. "It was always intended to be a pilot for a TV series, but it never seemed like the kind of show a network would expand into a lot of episodes. I thought about making a miniseries with it, so when Cartoon Network actually offered it to me that way, I was thrilled."

#### **Getting audience buy-in**

Once it was determined that *Over the Garden Wall* would be a brand-new format for Cartoon Network, the studio's inhouse agency, Creative Group, went to work on a promotional strategy to ensure the audience would tune in.

"The biggest marketing challenge was figuring out how to talk about this new kind of show with our audience, because a miniseries doesn't mean anything to them," says Ouweleen. "Two years of work was going to be televised over five nights and then be gone—we had to get people there."

The strategy, according to Ouweleen, took shape with onair promos that invited parents and kids to start a new kind of pre-holiday couch moment that could potentially translate into the kind of annual holiday viewing event that surrounds movies like *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Sound of Music*.

Another on-air promo idea, initiated by Creative Group's creative director Larry Morris, appeared at the end of each night's episode and used the conceit of an open-book graphic teasing the next chapter of the story.

Cartoon Network took the plan further by working in tandem with McHale across the entire marketing process. "We generally try to work with show creators probably more than other networks in terms of how we launch programs," says Ouweleen. Calvin Florian, Creative Group senior production manager, adds that McHale offered to help create the promotional material and give direction related to key art. "From the beginning, Pat was very gracious with his time," says Florian. "Having been on *Adventure Time*, he knew what needed to be done to make things better. And he paid incredible attention to detail."

As for the creation of the series' "Read and Listen" storybook and vinyl record, Morris says the idea was developed in a meeting with McHale. "If you close your eyes, the story

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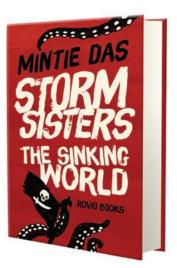


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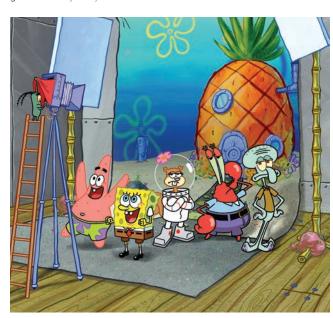
What's bubbling up in kid content culture



#### Rovio gets outside Angry Birds universe

In one of its first big moves to diversify itself from the Angry Birds franchise, Finland's Rovio Entertainment is turning to its books division with Storm Sisters: The Sinking World. It's the first of a new series of pirate-themed YA novels targeting young girls that will hit retail shelves later this year. Penned by Finnish author Mintie Das, the book was recently selected as a finalist in Germany's Books of Berlinale festival, which

looks for titles with film adaptation potential. *The Sinking World* debuted at the Frankfurt Book Fair last year and has since secured publishers in France, Hungary, Indonesia and Finland. With a second book, *The Frozen Seas*, already in the works, the series is Rovio's first non-Angry Birds book publishing venture and another attempt, following Angry Birds Stella, to zero-in on the girls market. –Jeremy Dickson



#### Nick dives into the OTT space

In a move that will see it become one of the first cable channels to go over-the-top (OTT), Nickelodeon is set to launch a direct-to-consumer subscription service in March. The announcement comes as other premium channels including HBO and Showtime are currently working on OTT services, and popular SVOD platforms like Netflix and Amazon are continuing to thrive in the online and mobile space for kids and families. The upcoming launch will see Nick strengthen its already robust digital offerings, which include the Nick App, VOD platform My Nick Junior and the more recent Nick Jr. App. Nick plans to unveil the name of its new OTT service and details about its functionality at the company's upfront presentation later this month. The move is further proof of the shifting ways in which viewers consume and pay for content. —Jeremy Dickson

#### 

sounds like an old-time radio show, so someone suggested we could make a "Read and Listen" book. Then we went out on a ridiculous limb and made a vinyl record," says Morris.

Ouweleen credits the collaborative approach with McHale, who wrote the record's content and helped write its songs, as a key reason for the press kit's success. "It also worked because the team viewed the record as a content extension of the show and not necessarily as a piece of marketing," he says.

#### **Format challenges**

For McHale, working on his first miniseries involved a couple of big challenges. "One, it felt like writing a feature film and a TV series at the same time," he says. "I had to make sure each episode had its own arc that was satisfying and different, and that came to a complete end. But at the same time, I had to keep track of the overall arcs and get the characters where they needed to be by the end of the series."

The second challenge for McHale presented itself on the production side. "Because it was such a short-term project, it was very hard to get full-time, in-house staff," contends McHale. "We got some of the most talented people in the industry to work on the show, but we had to do a lot of free-lance. It's also always hard to do a traveling show with completely new characters, backgrounds, color schemes, etc. in every episode—that was a lot of work."

Despite the challenges, Cartoon Network's decision to try something completely different paid off in the end. *Over the Garden Wall* reached a total of 4,277,000 viewers ages two and up. It also averaged more than two million kids two to 11, and according to Ouweleen, its ratings grew with each new episode—especially towards its finale.

#### "It's definitely encouraging for the studio to see it work, and I would be amazed if we didn't bring it back next year."

- Michael Ouweleen, Cartoon Network CMO

"It means people either didn't find it hard to enter mid-week, or they were coming back every night, or a combination of the two," says Ouweleen. "It's definitely encouraging for the studio to see it work, and I would be amazed if we didn't bring it back next year." He also sees streaming opportunities for the miniseries. "It will certainly find a life as a bundle—either on our platform or our partners' platforms—because it lends itself to bingeviewing. That's what we were trying for." "3



## Pipeline An early peek at shows on the development track















Deer Little Forest First launched as a licensing property in 2013, Deer Little Forest is the brainchild of Jo Rose, an illustrator with a love of folklore and fairies who studied costume design and theatrical makeup at the London College of Fashion. The comedy/music series follows the woodland adventures of feisty main character Forest Flo and her troupe of friends including Bodhi the Bear, Rowan the Philosophical Fox and Barley Crumb the Badger. The show's curriculum encourages kids living in a modern world to appreciate imagination, friends and the natural world.

Producer: King Rollo Films (UK)

Style: 2D animation Format: 52 x 11 minutes **Budget: US\$4.5 million** 

Status: A bible and trailer are complete for Kidscreen Summit. Looking for broadcast and distribution partners, and plans are in the works for online games, apps and digital books. Publishing deals have been secured with UK preschool magazines Get Busy and Busy Time. Stationery and apparel deals have also been signed. All rights are managed by Lisa Hryniewicz at Koko Media, excluding North America.

**Delivery:** September 2016

Dougie Noir This new series follows the adventures of high-functioning eight-year-old Dougie who would rather focus on a career as a kid detective than follow in the footsteps of his mum, dad and peers—all performers in the family-run big top show Cirque Énigme. Kavaleer founder and show creator Andrew Kavanagh drew inspiration from Cortechs, a Dublin tech firm that's developing software to help kids with ADHD. Both companies are now partnered with mobile video platform VBOT to launch a suite of brainfitness apps for kids with autism

and ADHD.

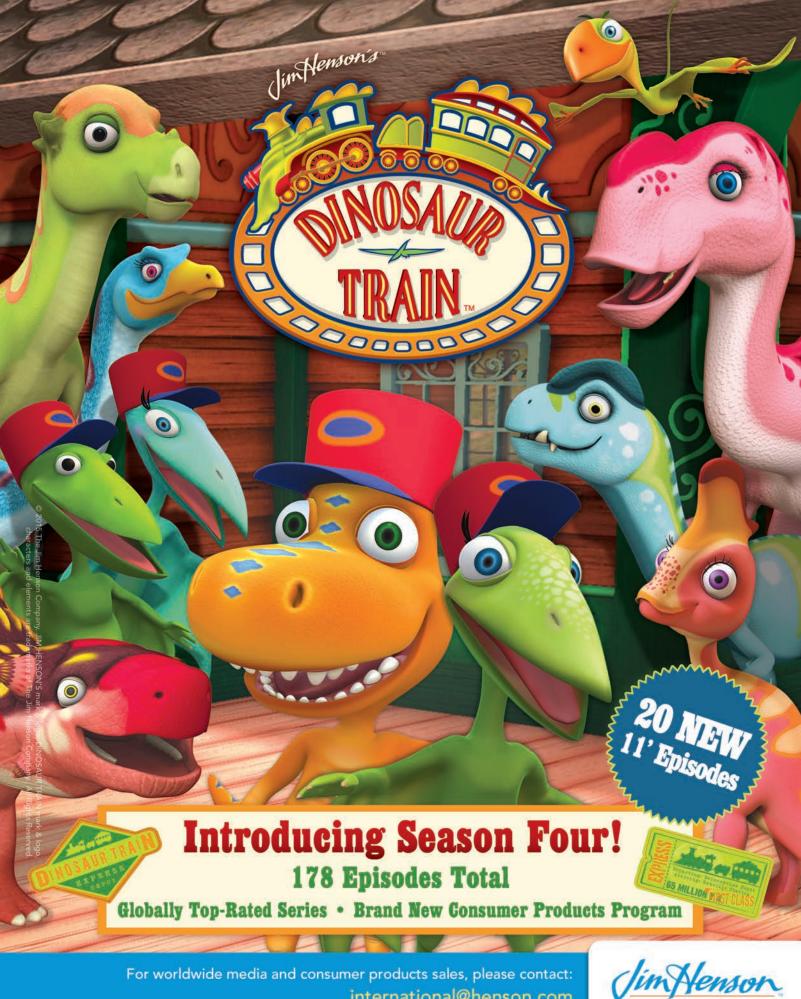
**Budget: US\$4.5 million** 

Status: Very early development, working on a bible with slate funding secured by Creative Europe, and looking for co-pro partners.

**Delivery:** Late 2017







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Cirque zeroes in on kids

How **Cirque du Soleil Média** and **Saban Brands** are making the impossible possible with the first Cirque-inspired kids property, Luna Petunia

BY JEREMY DICKSON

conic Montreal, Canada-based performing arts organization Cirque du Soleil has achieved more success in its 30-year history than most companies ever dare to dream about. Since Guy Laliberté founded the company in 1984, its unique live shows have thrilled close to 150 million spectators in more than 300 cities in 40-plus countries on six continents. Generating US\$850 million in revenue in 2013, Cirque currently operates 20 different touring shows simultaneously around the world and continues to evolve and expand globally.

In December 2012, it caught the attention of the kids entertainment industry by launching Cirque du Soleil Média, a joint-venture with Canadian broadcast heavy-weight Bell Media. The plan was to expand the Cirque brand and its values beyond live shows into new and original youth- and kid-targeted content for television, film and digital platforms.

The joint-venture's first project brought L.A.-based Saban Brands (*Power Rangers*, *Julius Jr.*, *Popples*) into the mix in February 2014 to help launch a kids property that includes a TV series, a consumer products line and interactive content. Eight months later, Cirque and Saban introduced Luna Petunia to the world at MIP Junior, and revealed that an animated TV series of the same name was already in development with Bradley Zweig (*Sid the Science Kid, Yo Gabba Gabba!*) as showrunner.

The series marks uncharted waters for Cirque du Soleil Média, but the company is confident its collaboration with Saban will move the property in the right direction and open up a wealth of opportunities.

During a recent visit to Cirque headquarters, where a joyful, creative energy permeates every inch of its vast interior, *Kidscreen* spoke with Daniel Lamarre (president and CEO of Cirque du Soleil), Jacques Méthé (president of Cirque du Soleil Média), Elie Dekel,



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(president of Saban Brands) and Brian Casentini (Saban SVP of development and production) about Cirque's move into the kids space and the progress of the series.

#### Why preschool animation?

When Cirque was initially exploring ways to bring the magic and emotion of its live shows to a larger audience through mass media, it kept coming back to kids animation. "We've been toying with the idea of kids animation for many years. We think it is the right way to attract a new demo," Lamarre says. "It's very important to expand Cirque's target demo beyond those who can afford to go to its live shows in person."

they interact with us see the surface, the acrobatics and colors. He cut straight to our DNA and values. He asked right away, 'Who is Luna and what drives her?'"

#### **Creating Luna**

While *Luna Petunia* will have nothing to do with circus life, Cirque's values and the whimsical nature of its stage shows will seep into the fabric of the series' characters, stories and visual world.

The series follows the adventures of a little girl, Luna, who lives in the real world, but plays in a dreamland where she learns to make the impossible possible. She teaches young

viewers the importance of believing in



And when it came time to pinpoint a specific age group within kids, Cirque and Saban both agreed that preschool was a sweet spot. "For the majority of the world, adults are the most aware of the Cirque brand," says Casentini. "So we felt that because moms and parents control the media preschool kids consume, launching a preschool brand first made a lot of sense."

In addition, Saban's global success with its own brands and Zweig's experience in developing and producing TV series were big factors in Cirque's final decision. "Bradley's openness to another creative process was a big factor for us," notes Méthé. "A lot of people when

development of the backgrounds has started. The 52 x 11-minute series will be 2D-animated with 3D elements, and Casentini says Cirque and Saban are actively seeking coproduction partners. "We are looking at a bunch of different Canadian studios in conjunction with Cirque Média to help us produce the series, but no official decision has been made yet," he says.

As for scripts, Zweig is currently writing episode one and a number of premises have been turned into full story outlines.

#### Luna's world

The narrative begins at Luna's birthday party. After her

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friends leave, she receives a special gift from her mischievous aunt Zuzu—a mysterious box adorned with a petunia and filled with unusual toy characters. The box is also inscribed with the phrase, "Make the impossible possible today...feel your heart, touch your mind, and swirl away!" When Luna speaks the words, she is magically transported to the world of Amazia, where the toy characters from the box come to life and accompany her on wondrous adventures.

One of Luna's friends, Sammy-Stretch, is a playful character who is fluent in gibberish (how Cirque!), and has accordions for limbs that make music when they move. He loves riddles and games, and he often challenges Luna to try new things.

Bibi Bubbles, Amazia's excitable brainiac tour guide, and cuddly Koalaroo, who has a kangaroo tail, the body of a koala bear and springs for legs, round out the core ensemble. A particularly creative aspect of the Bibi Bubbles character is that her thoughts can be seen by other characters because they appear in bubbles that pop out of her ears.

As for unique environments, the series features a mood willow tree that changes a character's hair color to suit their mood when they walk under it. Wiggly lily pads also react to characters' emotions.

In the development of the show's characters, Méthé says a number of Cirque artists were called on for creative input. "A bunch of them are involved and have produced all sorts of elements that are in the present course of development. We will keep on this path because it is working really well," he says.

#### **Future opportunities**

With positive early reactions across the board from broadcasters at MIPCOM, and a deal close to being secured with a global distribution partner, Cirque and Saban are confident in the potential of the IP.

"It's exciting and frightening because we have to deliver," says Méthé.

Lamarre concurs. "The risk is that we have to produce a series that will not only be appealing to viewers, but that will be a good demonstration of our brand, too," he says. "Our consumers have very specific expectations of what Cirque is all about, and it's very important that moms recognize the creativity in the new brand. Obviously, we don't want to disappoint them."

With delivery of the series expected for summer 2016, Cirque and Saban are also exploring ways to extend *Luna Petunia* to interactive, digital, learning and other consumer products. "As the creative is developing, we are paying a great deal of attention to how the storylines, characters and visuals can translate to the other platforms," says Dekel.

One of the ultimate goals, according to Lamarre, would be to launch an immersive live experience and bring the property back to what Cirque does best. "The greatest reward we could have, and it would be a first for us, would be to establish a character that has enough impact to integrate into a live show."





## **Discovery Family Channel** (formerly The Hub Network) strengthens co-viewing with broader focus on families in primetime

The challenge When Discovery Communications/Hasbro joint-venture The Hub Network announced it would relaunch on October 13, 2014 under the new name Discovery Family Channel, the intent was to continue growing the kids daypart. The majority of content would come from Hasbro Studios (more than 50%) and during primetime the net would broadcast a wider selection of family-friendly, real-world programs culled from Discovery's deep content vault.

And in just a few months, executives at the channel have noticed significant changes. "What we've seen so far is an almost immediate shift to a different demo in primetime," says Tom Cosgrove, who came on-board as GM after leaving his post as CEO and president of Sony/Discovery/Imax joint-venture 3net.

"Our median age went from about 20 years old to mid-30s almost overnight. We've also shifted from a very female audience to 50/50. We've gone from younger girls watching with their moms to a family audience. There is still a lot to develop, but it's what we set out to do."

To make the necessary programming changes, Discovery took a 60% majority stake in the channel, which meant Hasbro's share dropped to 40%.

Despite the decrease, Cosgrove says the channel remains just as committed to the kids daypart, which runs from approximately 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. "It's roughly half of our schedule. Hasbro is still a huge partner and a big supplier of our content," he says. "But they are not the only supplier. We are actively talking to some others and will continue to air third-party content."

**Daytime programming** For its kids audience, Discovery Family Channel was quick to bring back popular Hasbro animated series *Transformers Rescue Bots*, which skews to younger Transformers fans. But under the new strategy, the older-skewing *Transformers: Robots in Disguise* ended up being licensed to Cartoon Network.

"Robots in Disguise is a great IP, but it is less of a fit for us. The types of daytime shows that work best for us skew more towards My Little Pony, Littlest Pet Shop and Pound Puppies," says Cosgrove.

Those series have all returned to the daytime lineup, but the channel also required some new programming. It landed big ratings with the addition of My Little Pony Equestria Girls: Rainbow Rocks. The latest iteration of the hit franchise, the made-for-TV movie aired in afternoon and early primetime slots. "It's done really well and attracted not only kids, but also a good adult audience, too," says Cosgrove.

**Primetime picks** To maximize co-viewing, the channel brought former Discovery Networks International VP of production and factual development Sarah Davies on-board to help guide the network's direction. Popular programs including *Superhuman*, *Time Warp*, *Flying Wild Alaska*, *Africa* and *Extreme Engineering: Biggest Reveals* were quickly added to the lineup.

Cosgrove is currently looking for additional shows in this vein, primarily non-fiction with lots of adventure, science, natural history and animals, and he's not averse to acquiring movies.

"We are building on a library of acquired movies because they work well to bring in a family audience," he says, noting the channel is also eyeing stories about big historical mysteries.

"These types of programs have been a little less touched in recent years by a lot of the networks. Stories about Egypt, the Titanic and Amelia Earhart have worked surprisingly well for us."

What's next Looking ahead, Cosgrove says the biggest challenge will be getting the word out about Discovery Family Channel itself. "We're a relatively new brand, and like any new brand we're trying to carve out our niche," he says.

As the channel looks to build on The Hub Network's reach of 70 million US homes and increase co-view ratings, it plans to leverage the power of its biggest brands on-air, across social media, online fan sites and through retail.

It recently held a successful Twitter party for the premiere of *Transformers Rescue Bots*, and cross-promotional strategies are in the works with Hasbro, Discovery Kids and newly launched Discovery Consumer Products.

"The retail business is a long lead, about 18 months to two years," says Cosgrove. "It takes time, but we've had some initial discussions. It's a natural fit." –Jeremy Dickson

New made-for-TV movie My Little Pony Equestria Girls: Rainbow Rocks was a hit with both kids and adults for the rebranded channel





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# Ready to learn

**Disney Publishing Worldwide** takes on the
US educational product
and toy market with its
app-driven Imagicademy

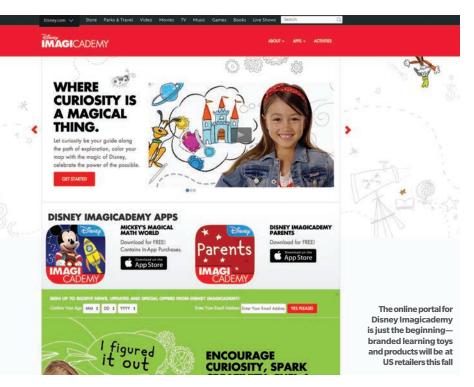
BY DAWN WILENSKY

racticing math with Mickey and Minnie and learning science with Anna and Elsa isn't just a fairytale anymore. New technology-driven brand Disney Imagicademy is taking preschoolers on a learning adventure that offers parents a way to expose kids to fundamental educational concepts while entertaining them Disney-style.

Disney Publishing Worldwide and parent division Disney Consumer Products have entered the education market in an unprecedented way for the House of Mouse with Imagicademy. While based in the digital realm, DCP also intends to move the brand into the physical world and is developing a full CP program to take a bite out of the multi-billion-dollar educational toy and products market in the US.

Of course, Imagicademy's research-driven curriculum has the educational chops to back up its ambitions. Developed by Disney Publishing Worldwide, along with top academics and education experts, it was designed to meet a growing demand among parents for digital learning options that cut through the clutter and offer one comprehensive curriculum. The resulting apps and products cover key subjects that are important for early childhood development, including math, creative arts, science, language arts and social and emotional skills.

"I'm excited about how Disney Imagicademy has leveraged what we know about early child development to create a compelling experience for children with enduring characters and stories," says Constance Steinkuehler, associate professor in Digital Media at University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a consultant on the program. "There is some terrific research out there on children's emerging literacy and numeracy, but too



little of that research has shaped actual product design so that the digital products in children's hands represents the best of what we know about cognition, learning and development. Disney's Imagicademy is a great example of how learning and play, when designed well, can be utterly synonymous. They have taken the time to find the game in the content, and the results show."

Her enthusiasm is shared by Andrew Sugarman, EVP at Disney Publishing Worldwide. "We saw this as a great opportunity because it fits so well with what Disney is all about," he says. "Bringing content to life in magical ways is something that is part of our DNA, and the opportunity to interweave our characters and rich stories with great educational content is very exciting."

The first two apps, Mickey's Magical Math World and Disney Imagicademy Parents have been available on the Apple App Store since December, while Mickey's Magical Arts World launched in early February.

The math app features five math-focused activities, including counting forward and backward, sorting and classifying, skip counting, number- and shape-recognition, reasoning and logic. Companion app *Disney Imagicademy Parents* allows parents to send a digital high five, see their kids' creations, and get cues about questions and activities to enrich the children's game play.

"We know that what is happening on the couch is as important—if not more important!—than what's happening on screen," contends Steinkuehler. "Disney has managed to design with connected, contextualized, everyday home use in mind—and frankly, they've done it in ways that don't require hours of input from PhD's in Education to play a direct and positive role in your kid's gameplay. As a mom of two little boys, I love being able

to look over my sons' shoulders and make their gameplay into a family social activity without having to master every level of the game myself," she adds.

Helping to get the creative juices flowing, the newest app *Mickey's Magical Arts World* helps kids to create their own characters, stylize them and have them star in their very own cartoons alongside their Disney favorites. Disney Stores is supporting the creative arts app with special in-store "art of drawing" areas, where groups of kids can take lessons on how to draw their favorite characters.

Hot on its heels is a science app in March featuring Frozen's Anna, Elsa and Olaf, followed by a Doc Mc-Stuffins language arts app due in summer. The apps are each broken down into four worlds, with all but Doc Mc-Stuffins housing five activities—there are 10 for hers. A music app is also planned, but no firm launch date has been determined. All apps in the first year are aimed at kids three to five, and apps for six to eights are slated for year two.

"Reception on the Apple App Store has been very strong. The first two apps are #1 in the kids categories in 52 countries, and #1 in 41 international countries in the education category," says Jeff Sellinger, SVP of Disney Imagicademy.

Its recent partnership with First Book has also gotten the apps into the hands of low-income families, with the entertainment giant donating US\$5 million in apps and US\$50 million in corresponding books to the nonprofit organization as part of a three-year commitment. Social enterprise First Book will provide download codes to educators and programs serving children from low-income families.

And even more kids will be exposed to the brand this fall, when the first physical products head to retail shelves. Retail placement is currently being determined via meetings with both large and small US retailers in all channels of distribution.

The first products out of the gate will be a Mickey and Minnie smart plush, created by Boulder, Colorado-based Smart Toy, acquired last October by Culver City, California's Cartwheel Kids. (Smart Toy is best known for the Kickstarter-funded Ubooly, an interactive, educational plush toy that integrates with a smart phone.) Each plush has an internal operating system that makes it completely interactive and learns what the kids like, as well as adapting the learning to their interests.

Other products in play for the fourth quarter will be games and activities from The Wonder Forge in Seattle, Washington, and app-enhanced toys from Rahway, New Jersey-based KidDesign. Rounding out the mix will be augmented reality toys and enhanced books from Mercury Active in Ottawa, Canada. Talks are underway with other "like-minded companies interested in developing items from a cross-product perspective that will allow kids to learn to interact with content as well as engage in physical play by doing, creating and making," explains Sellinger. **3** 





# A magical pairing?

Spin Master and Nelvana team up to launch spell-casting property Little Charmers oys made with a touch of magic, a pinch of mischief and a dash of mayhem will look to cast a spell on preschool girls when the Little Charmers brand launches at mass retail in the US this fall. Spin Master and Nelvana are co-producing a new preschool series of the same name that debuted on Nickelodeon US and Treehouse TV (Canada) last month. And with a global Nickelodeon deal in hand, which will see *Little Charmers* rolling out in international territories over the next year, the partners are working on building a larger consumer products program for the property.

The  $80 \times 11$ -minute CGI-animated series focuses on a trio of friends who are coming to terms with their own magical powers. It often leads them on spellbinding adventures, where they use the magic of teamwork and friendship to fix their mishaps.

Accordingly, Spin Master is taking care of a toy line that's heading to North American retail this fall, and has designed products that capture the individual personalities of the show's three little charmers-in-training. There's Hasel, the curious animal whisperer; Posie, the sweet and quirky spellerina; and Lavender, the bright and feisty potionista.

"The fact that these little girls work together as friends is a very nice message," says Catherine Demas, global business lead and VP of design for girls and preschool at Spin Master. "Moms love that."

Along with role-play items and costumes, the upcoming Spin Master range also includes plush animals based on each girls' pet (cat, owl, dragon), and a full line of dolls with seasonal and special-episode outfits being made available as the show progresses. "It's a rolling mix of new outfits, so we keep it fresh at retail," says Demas.

Thanks to their unique partnership, Spin Master and Nelvana were able to work hand-in-hand during

animation process to find a balance between toy and entertainment needs.

"This was a chance for us to sit down and say, 'Let's look at what the preschool girls' universe looks like,' and ask, 'How can we create the kind of content that we think the audience is looking for," says Andrew Kerr, co-head of the studio's commercial arm, Nelvana Enterprises.

Both sides agree the show's ensemble cast will make it very relatable to young female viewers, and they are hopeful that this quality will set the toys apart in a crowded preschool space.

"What you get is a nice dynamic, and what you see on screen is an interplay amongst the three girls that echoes what they see in their own lives with their best friends," says Kerr. "A lot of attention has gone into ensuring that the toys reflect the emotional and personal characteristics of each of the lead characters."

A global English-language publishing partner is soon to be announced, with the goal will be to follow up the North American toy line with Little Charmers books in spring 2016. "I think it will really help bring the brand to life and allow little girls to engage more substantially with the characters they see on-screen," says Kerr.

As for additional licensees, Nelvana Enterprises is looking to round out its soft goods and social expressions offerings. It is overseeing all secondary merchandising associated with the brand globally, working alongside Spin Master, which is managing the toy category. International licensees are also being sought for a merchandise rollout that will follow the Nickelodeon launches taking place across Europe towards the end of this year and into early 2016. "From a merchandising perspective, we're a little bit ahead of the curve in North America," adds Kerr.

-Patrick Callan





## On the shelf

## Disney's Pixar returns to retailers with toy deal for new feature film *Inside Out*

apanese toymaker Tomy is journeying deep into the mind of a young girl from the American Midwest to find inspiration for its new toy line based on Disney-owned Pixar's first movie release in two years, *Inside Out*. The newly announced master toy licensee plans to align the film's cast of emotions—joy, fear, anger, disgust, sadness—with innovative toys (figures, plush, playsets) to bring the characters to life off screen.

Inside Out revolves around Riley, a young girl who is uprooted to San Francisco when her father gets a new job. Living inside an HQ in her mind are her emotions, which help her navigate her new life, while conflicting in ways that produce maximum laughs.

"Kids are going to want to come back and recreate those scenes from the movie, and we've given them everything they need to be able to do that," says Willie Wilkov, CMO of Tomy. Targeting girls four to eight, poseable figures, which light up and project images onto a playset, lead the toy line that's designed to express the strengths of the emotions and their disparate personalities.

Licensor Disney Consumer Products is also working on a larger program for Inside Out in which apparel and accessories—featuring bold and colorful designs inspired by the emotions—are also key categories. Books, housewares, and game and app content (including the <code>InsideOut: Storybook Deluxe</code> app) will round out the product offering.

With *Inside Out* premiering Stateside on June 19, the product line starts rolling out at mass, mid-tier and specialty retailers across the country on May 15. Globally, products will be made available at retail four to six weeks before the film's debut in each region.

Tomy and DCP are also teaming up on the toy program for Pixar's second release this year, *The Good Dinosaur*. Featuring the extraordinary adventure of a young boy and an Apatosaurus, the movie premiers on November 25, so scant details about the film or the consumer products program have been revealed. Tomy does confirm it's prepping a line of action figures and RC walking-and-talking toys that employ RFID technology. –Patrick Callan





## CBeebies' Hey Duggee heads to retail

ollowing the successful January launch of CBeebies original toon Hey Duggee, commercial arm BBC Worldwide is readying a UK-based licensing program for the property. Global publishing partner Penguin, through its Ladybird imprint, will drive the Hey Duggee program with a range of picture, activity and novelty books that are scheduled to launch this summer. Next up, UK master toy licensee Golden Bear is set to unveil a line of plush, plastic collectibles and playsets at massmarket retailers this fall.

And mass is the key term here. "We're not pursuing retail exclusives," says Clare Piggott, BBCW head of merchandise. "It's important that we get the coverage. We hope to bring [Hey] Duggee to as broad an audience as possible."

The products will center around differentiating sound, size and color to emphasize the distinctive features of big friendly dog Duggee and the characters in The Squirrel Club (a rhino, hippo, octopus, mouse and crocodile). Duggee runs the adventurous children's playgroup, whose members earn badges for their accomplishments.

London-based Studio AKA created the 52-episode show, which is narrated by BBC One comedian Alexander Armstrong, along with a cast of children, and airs at 7:25 a.m. on weekdays.

As for what's following up the books and toys, Piggott says apps are definitely on her radar, as well as secondary categories like apparel that would support the toys. "We hope to roll out with further partners for 2016," she says.

What could prove to be a boon for the property in the highly competitive preschool licensing market is its linear format—in each ep, Squirrel clubbers are dropped off by their parents, earn a badge, then get picked up. "There's a very strong beginning, middle and end," explains Piggott. "I think that's what's very clear from a preschooler's perspective."

Official ratings weren't available at press time, but Piggott says the show has performed above its slot average. Plans for more *Hey Duggee* episodes are also in the hopper. In the meantime, BBCW is sussing out international broadcast partners.

—Patrick Callan





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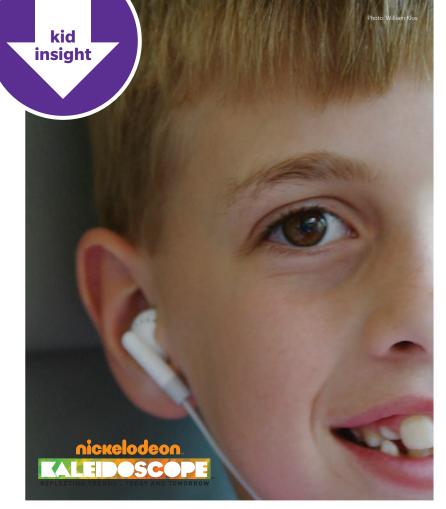












# **Tuneful tech**

Nickelodeon re-examines how kids' engagement with music has evolved

BY ERIN MILLER

2011, Kaleidoscope reported on the integral role that music plays in kids' lives, exploring how kids listen to music, the influences of song/music discovery and the importance of relatability in songs and artists. Today, kids are exposed to a rapidly evolving music landscape, which is influencing how they discover and listen to music. Nickelodeon believes this is the perfect time to explore the topic again, looking at how behaviors have shifted over the years, and the impact that the "mainstreaming of streaming" has had on this demo.

For six to 11s, the role of music is multi-layered and goes beyond just listening. Music is part of an experience that offers kids escapism, self-expression, aspiration and social currency. As penetration of device ownership among kids and tweens has increased, so has the frequency of music listening. Seven in 10 kids own a device (iPod Touch, cell phone or MP3 player) that they use to listen to music, an increase from 59% in 2011. Another significant contributor to the way kids are listening to music is YouTube. Behind the radio, YouTube is the second-most common way kids listen to music. This should come as no surprise, considering this generation of kids has grown up never knowing a world where all content isn't on-demand.

Accessing music on YouTube has several benefits for kids. First, they are in full control of their music experience, choosing the exact song they want to listen to at any given moment. When a kid finds the song he or she wants to listen to, more likely than not it's accompanied by a music video. As kids and tweens become more immersed in a digital world driven by imagery, it shouldn't be surprising that kids are actively seeking out music videos by their favorite bands and singers. Finally, YouTube is a genuine source of discovery for new music. Among sixto 11-year-olds, 51% of kids report discovering new music on YouTube. This number has increased from 35% in 2011, and is significantly higher (almost doubling from 25% to 49%) among six-to nine-year-olds.

Another component to the YouTube music experience is watching lyrical videos. More than 60% of kids report that lyrics and the meaning of a song are important to them. As a result, kids are searching for lyrics to songs they like. Lyrical videos—whether official or user-generated—that appear on YouTube are quick, easy ways for kids to listen to the song of their choice and follow along with the lyrics. This is just one more way for them to connect on an aspirational level to the songs and/or artists they love.

With multiple platforms and apps available that allow for easy, constant and customizable access to music, streaming has officially become mainstream among this demographic. Aside from YouTube, Pandora (50%), iTunes Radio (32%) and iHeartRadio (31%) are the top sites where kids listen to music. One thing to keep an eye on in the future is how influential a social networking component on these platforms could become to the kid audience. We know that music doesn't define kids' friendships and who they are, but it connects them to their friends and peers. The number of ways kids can connect to music continues to grow and will just get more competitive. From an adult perspective, the gap between music and social media is closing, and it will be interesting to see how kids adapt to the ever-changing music environment as their current behavior shifts more and more to streaming. @

This concludes our report on the role of music in kids' lives. Tune in to next month's brand new Kaleidoscope where we'll continue to explore the world of today's kids and families.

#### For more information, contact Kaleidoscope@nick.com

(Source: Nickelodeon Consumer Insights Research; Touchstone Research, June 2014. Quant sample N = 620)

A major focus of the Consumer Insights Department at Nickelodeon is to live and breathe kid culture. We continually track and identify trends, and explore what it means to be a kid and teen today. In an effort to keep you in touch with our audience and give a voice to our consumer, we've created the Nickelodeon Kaleidoscope. Every month, Kaleidoscope will capture key areas of interest across the kid and family cultural landscape, provide an understanding of attitudes and behaviors, and report on trends and buzz.



## YouTube is the new Google

The way kids investigate the world is shifting from search engine to VOD library

BY WYNNE TYREE

reschoolers, kids and tweens are growing up in a world where any question they have can be answered with a few keystrokes or swipes. In fact, they default to the digital world to meet a growing list of needs—from finding academic help and making social connections to simple busting boredom.

But unlike their uber-connected parents and the young adults from the prior generation, kids are migrating away from basic text search to video-based content as they look for visual answers to their burning questions. From how-to videos and homework help, to product reviews and keeping up-to-date on emerging musicians, YouTube is quickly becoming kids' go-to resource.

YouTube affinity among kids ages six to 12 has seen a meteoric rise over the past five years, as evidenced in Smarty Pants's annual *Young Love* study. From breaking into the Top 100 brands in 2010 (#86 out of 250) to cracking the top 10 in 2014 (#9 out of 256), YouTube is clearly a rising star in the youth market. The vast majority of kids six to 12 currently use the VOD portal, with roughly half of YouTube users frequenting the site two or more times a day.

Conversely, Google currently ranks a more modest #57 with kids—up just 15 spots since 2010. And though it is still a useful tool for kids, Google is a less direct way to get to the more experiential content they seek...and it simply doesn't inspire the passion they feel for YouTube.

YouTube is becoming kids' default portal to all that the internet has to offer. Why only read about something when you can watch it? Why do the work of searching dozens of links for great content when YouTube is sure to delight every time?

Eleven-year-old Alysse R. sums it up in her oh-so-tween voice. "I LOVE YouTube. I use it to look up stuff, and to watch funny videos, and figure out how to do stuff. I love *Xmas Jammies, Kid President*, Bethany Mota, *Dance Moms* clips, learning to cook with Nerdy Nummies, getting hair braiding ideas

from Bebexo, and looking up lyrics to 'Uptown Funk' and 'Lips Are Movin' so I can sing every word."

Reminding us of YouTube's salience in their lives, kids and tweens like Alysse have turned the brand name into a verb. They now say "YouTube it" in much the same way adults say "Google it."

Notably, YouTube's 10 most profitable channels of 2014 included those frequented by six to 12s, such as Swedish video game commentator's PewDiePie, Taylor Swift's channel and stampylonghead (daily *Minecraft* uploads), with the top spot going to DisneyCollectorBR (aka DC Toys Collector), a channel dedicated to unboxing and playing with toys.

YouTube and its parent company Google have gotten the message. They are "revamping [their] products with a 12-and-younger focus" and looking to grow the Family Entertainment and Learning division at YouTube to help lead the charge. It's a smart move.

As kids continue to move away from exclusively text-based thinking toward more connected and interactive video- and image-based thinking, YouTube is well-positioned to provide the answers they need and the entertainment they crave in the format they prefer. And for content/product developers and marketers, it's critical to understand the power of YouTube. It's where kids watch clips of movies before they'll buy the DVD, see toys in action before asking for the real thing, and learn to ride a bike before heading outside. Brands that work to cultivate a kid-focused, multi-media presence on YouTube will be a step ahead as today's kids become tomorrow's purchasers.



**Wynne Tyree** is the president of Smarty Pants, a youth and family market research and consulting firm. Heads Up! is derived from the company's daily

in-person and digital immersion into the lives of kids and families, as well as proprietary quantitative research. For more information on how Smarty Pants can help grow your business, contact Meredith Franck at 914-939-1897 or visit asksmartypants.com.













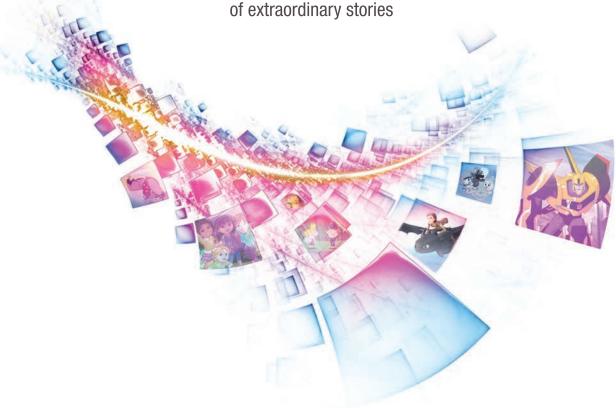


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With indie apps cropping up across the market, here's how well-designed ones like *Mr. Cupcake Has The Sprinkles* are cutting through the clutter

BY DANIELA FISHER

ou might not know Josh Book by name, but chances are you've seen his work. As Nickelodeon's former CG creative director, he oversaw animation on shows like *Bubble Guppies* and *The Penguins of Madagascar*. Disney Junior's *Sheriff Callie's Wild West*, billed as the first Western for preschoolers, also benefited from his animation expertise.

Having logged some serious toon time with the big boys, Book made the jump into indie waters in 2012, launching Mighty Yeti Studios with his wife, Jennie. Fastforward three years—and a heck of a lot of work—and the pair's whacky, wickedly drawn interactive storybook apps are now on the market.

"We like to create goofy IPs that make us laugh," Book explains. "Jennie comes up with the stories. I do early designs for what the characters could look like." Along with character sketches, he also oversees animation and technical production.

The Books are part of a budding subset of app developers—industry creators striking out to craft their own kid-

targeted offerings. And like anyone big or small working in the space, they've had to confront the challenge of getting their apps discovered in a crowded market.

#### A numbers game

A recent report from US-based mobile analytics company Adjust found that there are roughly 131,581 kids apps and 58,583 book apps available in the Apple App Store worldwide. But while the competition is fierce, the potential for success is there. Last year set a record for the App Store, with developers earning a cumulative US\$25 billion worldwide from sales of apps and games.

That number could grow substantially—global mobile game revenue is expected to generate US\$30.3 billion worldwide in 2015, according to research firm Newzoo. For app developers looking to get a cut of the action, a catchy character or title is no longer enough to sell product. Instead, the right marketing strategy is the key to discoverability.

#### **An indie story**

Book can attest firsthand to the challenge of discoverability. Mighty Yeti's first app, *Mr. Cupcake Has The Sprinkles*, tells the quirky tale of a cupcake determined to find the source of a mysterious crunching noise. With illustrations from

animation artist Eddie Betancourt, the storybook app had the pedigree. The trick was promoting it.

"We weren't hitting the numbers we wanted," says Book. After a lot of price experimentation and looking at different ways to expand the audience, Mighty Yeti made *Mr. Cupcake* available for free.

The app had 211 downloads before it was reclassified as free. By the following day, it had more than 26,000.

"We thought, 'This can't be right,'" recalls Book. "It had broken into the top 40 for all books. It was above My Little Pony and below Marvel. What that told us is that there is an audience there. We just had to figure to how to connect with that audience. We're now looking at developing more episodic story content, chapter-based stories where we can give away the first one for free and have the other ones in the series as paid."



Having launched two apps last year (*Mr. Cupcake, A Shark Knocked on the Door*), and with two more rolling out this month and later this spring (*Jacob The Gibberish Machine, Maggie Is Afraid Of Monsters*), Book says he has found a light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to marketing. Building a presence organically has allowed

the studio to score downloads without breaking the bank on PR campaigns.

"Having our work reviewed by bloggers and review sites has been very helpful. They're curators that people trust," Book contends. He also puts weight on maintaining relationships via social media with the core fan group (whether that's five or 5,000 people), as they're the ones most likely to post reviews in the App Store.

Marketing expert Karen Robertson, who specializes in book apps, agrees. As the author of titles like *How to Market a Book App* and the Treasure Kai series of book apps, she recommends starting at the grassroots level.

"You look at the top 200 now [in the App Store] and there are big brands everywhere," notes Robertson. "So how can indies compete? One way is by joining forces with industry organizations like the Book App Alliance. Another is to go local with message direction. Word-of-mouth is really the essential thing."

Rounding out the list, for today's transmedia consumers, Book plans to market *Mr. Cupcake* across media platforms, via short YouTube videos and mobile games, to drive kids back to the apps.

#### The animation effect

Another strong pull for Mighty Yeti's book apps is the quality of their illustrations and animation. Each story-book app is professionally sourced through Book's network of industry contacts.

Whether doing gutter races with Grandma in A Shark Knocked On The Door, or getting Mr. Cupcake to pat his dog (who has the tongue-in-cheek name Mr. Cat), the stories captivate.

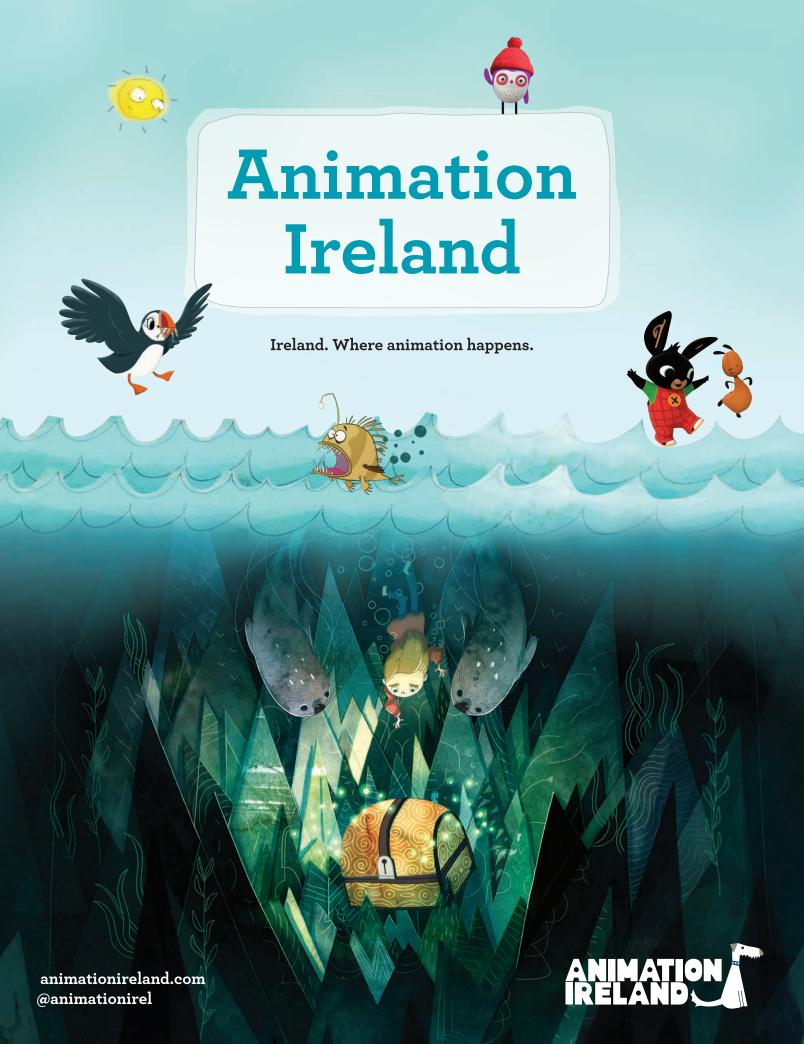
This works for Mighty Yeti on two fronts. First, even though the apps were developed by a very small team, they seem like they were created by a much larger studio. Second, they reinforce the quality of the property, a main selling point for parents.

"Having worked on so many properties that appeal to kids, it's gotten me into the mindset of what kids and parents are looking for," says Book. "That was a big thing at Nickelodeon—wanting parents to feel good about the content their kids were watching."

#### **Know thy audience**

Ultimately, for Robertson, it comes down to having a marketing plan in place and reaching out to the audience before launch. "Most app creators spend all their time focusing on creating the app, and then the app is live and they scramble," she notes.

"Probably the biggest mistake I've seen creators make is that they've placed all their hopes on being featured by the App Store. They think if they can be featured, which is like a one-in-a-million chance, they're going to come up roses," asserts Robertson. She contends that developers should instead be doing a little bit of something a couple times of week to help build awareness and keep their apps front-of-mind. "I always tell people it's a marathon, not a sprint."





**New Kid** in Town

## **Battle ready**

# Mobile startup **Seriously** is creating game-based 360-degree IPs, starting with *Best Fiends*

**The slug life** It was an invasion of Spanish slugs that spurred the development of Best Fiends, the new mobile game from Finnish startup Seriously. After the slimy intruders overran the garden of chief creative officer Petri Järvilehto, their invasion sparked a bedtime

story for his kids. Later, that story became the basis for the startup's first property.

Launched in August 2013, Seriously was co-founded by two former Rovio executives, Andrew Stalbow, former Rovio EVP of strategic partnerships, and Järvilehto, ex-EVP of games. Their goal was to create mobile games that could be developed into entertainment brands, complete with animated shorts and merchandise.

To do this, the duo brought aboard a roster of industry players for the new venture, including colleagues who had worked on Angry Birds, as well as talent from Disney and 20th Century Fox. Seriously now has a 22-person staff, with the game production team in Finland, and development and marketing in L.A.

**The Pixar connection** "We're creating IP that's subversive yet sweet, something for the whole family," notes Andrew Stalbow, CEO. "We wanted to see if we could build the Pixar of mobile." To that end, Seriously aims to make a difference with its game, creating visually stunning properties. And like Pixar, there will be fewer releases on the slate, as the company focuses on crafting a small group of well-designed games.

So why the mobile-first approach? The company believes that the next generation of entertainment—much like today's kids—will be greatly influenced by touchscreen tech. "We saw that audiences were shifting very quickly from traditional media devices to mobile ones," Stalbow recalls. "We think mobile is going to be where the next generation of entertainment brands get built."

The company's first title, *Best Fiends* is a puzzle-adventure game set in the world of Minutia. Players can collect and evolve characters, as they fight against the evil slugs of Mount Boom. Available for free on iOS and Android, the app launched last October, pulling in a million downloads in its first six days. It now clocks more than 400,000 hours of game play a day, according to Stalbow. Notably, the game's music is composed by Heitor Pereira, who worked on the music for *Despicable Me*. This was an ideal opportunity for Seriously, which strives to reach a similar audience as the villain-gone-good movie. "We definitely see ourselves more in the family space," Stalbow explains. "We're creating a brand that's for everyone, just like The Simpsons or Despicable Me."

**What's next** Best Fiends will be supported by a series of animated shorts on YouTube, along with assorted content like original music, making-of videos and limited-edition artwork. As with any 360 entertainment property, Seriously plans to build ancillary revenue streams around Best Fiends, which down the line could include consumer products, long-form animation and books. "Ultimately we kind of think of ourselves as doing Hollywood backwards," says Stalbow. "We just happen to be starting with the game." —Daniela Fisher

### **The Digits**

Numbers that speak volumes about kids and technology

More proof tablets and tots go hand-in-hand—Roughly

#### 71% of two to fives

in the US have used tablets
(Communicus)



A new study finds eReading is on the rise with kids:

#### two-thirds

of 13 & unders now read digital books—and 92% do so at least once a week (PlavCollective and Digital Book World)

Kids who sleep with smartphones and tablets in their rooms get nearly

## 21 fewer minutes of shuteye

than kids with device-free rooms (Pediatrics journal)

zzZZZ

Children ages two to 11 spend **22-plus hours** 

a week watching TV, three hours on game consoles and 18 minutes watching video on the internet

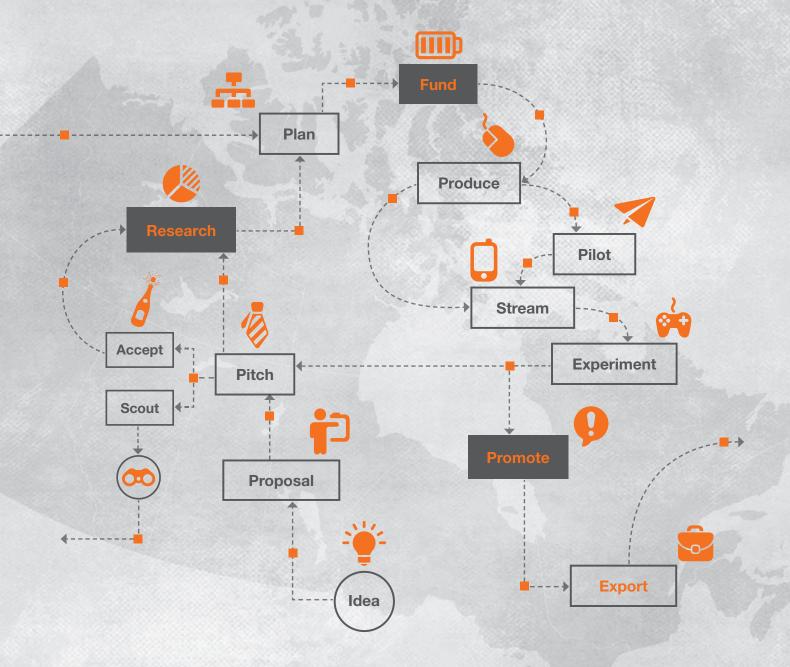
(Nielsen)

With the mobile game industry expected to generate

#### US\$30.3 billion

worldwide in 2015, it's on track to replace console as the largest game segment

(Newzoo)



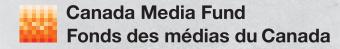
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### TOY FAIR

# How YouTube stars and multi-million view unboxing channels are changing the face of toy marketing

seemingly early with the US\$550-million acquisition of Maker Studios last March. The Culver City, California-based outfit provides production and marketing services to independent video creators, and Disney's purchase is an indication of just how much the world's largest entertainment licensor values the growing clout of YouTube. "It's a totally new way of advertising," notes BMO Capital Markets analyst Gerrick Johnson, who Meet the lively eight-year-old behind specializes in the toy biz. "[The YouTube channels] are becoming more and more important."

new class of tastemakers is disrupting the world of toy marketing. And the seat of power in the evolving landscape is being filled largely by kids. Handles like EvanTubeHD, Kit-

tiesMama and MommyandGracieShow are becoming very familiar to those in the toy industry, after 2014 witnessed the incredible flowering of YouTube as a platform of powerful influence. Disney, for one, got in **Unboxing the hits** There is one name that looms large above all others in this space—EvanTubeHD. The affable eight-year-old boasts more than a billion views across his three dedicated channels, and an ever-growing subscription base that recently surpassed one million. What started out as a lark has, in fact, become a booming industry. EvanTubeHD's short-form videos are stunningly simple. They consist of an off-camera adult voice (Evan's dad and video producer Jared) engaging the charming youngster as he reviews toys with an infectious mix of enthusiasm and wonder.

The EvanTubeHD channel debuted in 2011. Although the star's last name and location are a tightly guarded secret, his charisma is on display for all to see. The channel's popularity is also aided by its partnership with YouTube talent hive Maker Studios. Founded in 2009, the aforementioned Disney-owned studio currently has a network of sites that includes more than 55,000 independent creators, working in more than 100 countries, and attracts an estimated nine billion views every month.

"The creator-consumer market has exploded," says Bonnie Pan, EVP of programming at Maker. "Companies are looking to us for the opportunity to show their toys." And along those lines, Toronto, Canada-based toyco Tech 4 Kids was among the first companies to harness the power of EvanTubeHD.

"We identified him early on and were able to get exposure for our Mash'ems Angry Birds line," says Brad Pedersen, president and CEO of Tech 4 Kids. He first heard of EvanTubeHD around the Christmas season of 2012, when a member of the company's marketing team mentioned the channel during one of its regular weekly roundtables. "He had been combing through YouTube and said there was a cute kid who told a good story," Pedersen recalls. "We then sent Evan some toys—it was as simple as that."

From that discovery—and the minimal shipping costs incurred—Pedersen estimates that EvanTubeHD's review of the Angry Birds Mash'ems line received upwards of 80 million total views, helping to establish the toys and give the company serious leverage at retail. "We had a good run with Evan." Pedersen remarks.

With the invaluable help of Maker, EvanTubeHD now resides in the penthouse level of the YouTube influencer community. Evan has inked deals with Toronto, Canada-based Spin Master to promote its Spy Gear line and a number of other products. Additionally, retailer Toys 'R' Us has also signed on as a channel sponsor in a package that features filmed field trips to local TRUs with the company's logo displayed in the lower right corner of each video. There are unconfirmed estimates that the grade-schooler pulls in more than US\$1 million a year through his channel views, sponsorship deals and endorsements.

But this story does not begin and end with EvanTubeHD. There is a plethora of reviewers and unboxers who have found a substantial online audience. The unboxing videos, as the name implies, typically feature not much more than a pair of hands opening a package and describing the toy as it's revealed. The most popular channels in this category

include Maker Studios' ToysReviewToys and indie DC Toys Collector, a channel operated by a 21-year-old Westchester, New York woman whose manicured digits have entranced 3.5 million subscribers and attract more than 400 million views a month.

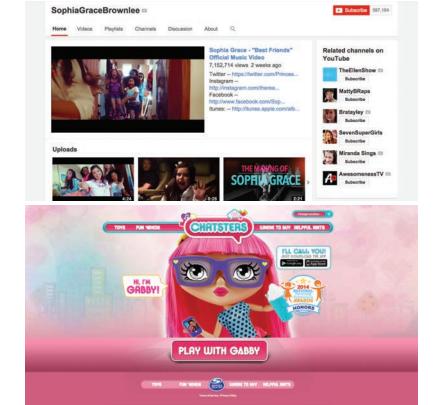
Other popular channels include DisneyCarToys, the number-two YouTube toy channel in the world, boasting 1.4 million subscribers. It features short-form videos that essentially show kids playing with, and creating their own stories from, Disney-themed toys.

With these big subscription numbers, it might be difficult for toy marketers to keep in mind that there is much to be gained from seeking out smaller content creators, who also have a potent connection with their audience. "There is nothing that takes the place of paying attention," explains Bill Graham, VP of business development at Jazwares, the Sunrise, Florida-based toyco that licenses Minecraft and has had a successful online campaign for its own IP, Fliptastic Bungees. "I think a lot of people are looking at it like the Wild West again," he says. "There are a lot different people to embrace."

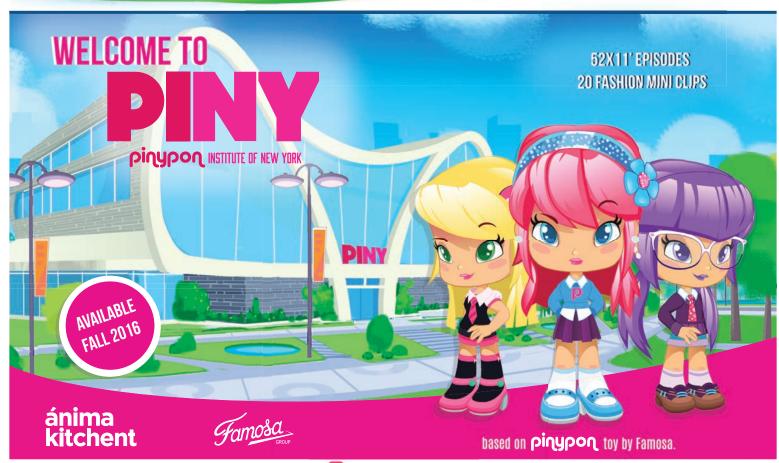
Krista DiBeradino, CMO of Toronto, Canada-based Spin Master, says the company casts a wide net with its outreach efforts. "We provide product to between 300 and 400 different influencers," she says. "We are always on the lookout to see who is the most appropriate for us and who we should reach out to."

**Right product, right channel** An example of a successful partnership between an online personality and a toyco is Spin Master's Chatster campaign with 11-year-old YouTuber Sophia Grace. Her girl-skewing musical channel SofiaGraceBrownlee was first propelled into the spotlight by US daytime talk show host Ellen DeGeneres,

Spin Master tapped into YouTuber Sophia Grace's girl appeal to promote its Chatsters line last year







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#### TOY FAIR

who took a liking to Grace's pop music cover performances. Since Grace's appearance on Ellen, SofiaGraceBrownlee's popularity has skyrocketed and it currently has more than 600,000 subscribers. Last year, Spin Master inked a partnership with Grace to promote its Chatster interactive doll on her channel in the run-up to the product's debut at New York Toy Fair. "We felt it was a good fit for the product," says DiBeradino, adding that there was a close alignment of content, tone and demographic.

Tech 4 Kids' Pedersen says he looks beyond raw subscription numbers and has found success by digging deeper into the YouTube universe. "There is RadioJH Audrey who has 243,000 subscribers," he says, indicating that the number is a fraction of EvanTubeHD's haul. "But we know she is a big fan of our Squishy Pop products, so the partnership made sense." He adds that having an ear to the ground can pay off when a company places the right product on the right channel.

Seeking out the most appropriate partners is one way to navigate the sheer number of players and exponential growth of online video, says Victor Lee, VP of digital marketing at Pawtucket, Rhode Island-based Hasbro. Making prudent decisions about who to partner with is the name of the game.

"We are really picky in terms of finding the right person," he says, explaining that label-slapping is as ineffective in this medium as any other. "We don't want it to feel like wallpaper," he says. "It's not just 'insert your brand here.' That won't work. The partner has to match the brand in terms of tone and voice."

**Like authentic, authentic** There is a single characteristic that ties together both the big-name reviewers and unboxers and their more niche counterparts—authenticity.

"There are a few elements that make EvanTube, for example, stand out," explains Maker Studios' Pan. "He is incredibly authentic. He tells a full story that has a beginning, middle and end. His expression of joy, wonder and surprise when he is opening up a toy is really what connects with an audience."

Spin Master's DiBeradino agrees that the key to the success of any YouTube celebrity is a quality that cannot be faked. "Kids want authenticity and they want to be entertained," she says. "They hunger for that real authentic voice."

For a generation brought up in an environment inundated with commercial messaging, the siren song of an authentic voice is proving hard to resist. Marc Rosenberg, a toy marketing veteran who is currently the CEO of Sky-BluePink Concepts, chalks up the growing popularity of the low-tech reviewers to a level of media literacy among kids that has far outpaced that of their parents.

"As a marketer, I feel like I can fool any parent into thinking that some toy is absolutely necessary for them to buy for their kid," he says. "But I can't fool a seven-year-old for one second. They are just smarter and more intuitive—and you have to respect that."



#### It's been greatly exaggerated

TV as a toy-marketing medium isn't dead yet, despite reports to the contrary. In fact, it's just that the zero-sum-game construction of a marketing budget is an outdated notion. While many companies admit that their TV spends are shifting, with more resources being invested in online campaigns, the migration is a slow one—TV still has a role to play.

"The marketing strategy has become fragmented," says Dan Meyer, director of marketing at Boca Raton, Florida-based toyco The Bridge Direct. "There are 50 spokes off the wheel now instead of three or four. When you are launching a toy, the general awareness that TV can provide is great, but you have to augment it with different platforms."

Krista DiBeradino, CMO of Toronto, Canada-based Spin Master, a leader in the online marketing realm, says the majority of the company's marketing spend is on traditional TV. "It's still the primary place," she says. "Kids are still watching TV in significant numbers. The fact is, our consumers are online and watching TV at the same time. So, you have to have a campaign that works together. Online isn't a replacement, it's complementary."

Victor Lee, VP of digital marketing for Pawtucket, Rhode Island-based Hasbro, agrees that in terms of broad appeal and mass-messaging, nothing can touch a traditional TV campaign. "There is a mass scale that TV still drives," he says. "It's as true now as ever."

Meanwhile, VP of business development for Florida-based Jazwares, Bill Graham, offers the company's campaign for Fliptastic Bungees as an example of how a coordinated campaign can leverage both strengths of the different mediums. "They are complementary," he says. "The national TV campaign introduced the program, but we complemented it with more in-depth character experience through a number of webisodes." (The webisodes range from just under a minute in length to full four-minute pieces.)

"People have been saying TV is dead or dying for years," says toy marketing veteran and CEO of SkyBluePink Concepts, Marc Rosenberg. "But the truth is that TV is still the biggest spend and the internet and mobile aren't going to end TV. Everyone knows that the evolution is happening—just not nearly as fast as some people might think." - Gary Rusak

Carol Spieckerman, president of the Bentonville, Arkansas-based retail consultancy newmarketbuilders, sees it in starker terms. "Authenticity is a key word with these YouTube stars," she says. "The advertising piece is obscured because it is an authentic medium. If you make it brand-forward, you are going to miss out on something."

**The inherent contradiction** Toycos are by-and-large reluctant to disclose the terms of their deals with YouTube influencers—though it appears that everything is pretty much on the table. "Some [online talent] take toys as compensation, some take straight-up compensation," explains Pedersen. "We consider both options and take it on a case-by-case basis."



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But a paradox emerges pretty quickly—while YouTube stars have the subscription numbers to support their influencer status, their viewers expect them to maintain independent and objective perspectives. Closely aligning with brands, then, can destroy the very thing that makes influencers popular in the first place.

"When you get people who think they are going to turn this into a business relationship, the fanbase goes away very quickly," says Rosenberg. Similarly, Pan says that toycos partnering with Maker's channels are cognizant of the nature of the appeal of key talent, and accordingly use a light touch. "Our creators are so authentic, that the deals are about providing access. It's not endorsement," she contends.

Jim Silver, editor-in-chief and CEO of *Time to Play* magazine, says marketers are only now finding their footing in this new and evolving landscape. "It's still a grey area," he says. "If reviewers are being paid for their reviews, well, that changes everything."

**Conversation starters** The rise of EvanTubeHD and its ilk indicates a more sweeping realignment of the relationship between consumers and brands. In fact, a "give-and-take" between consumers and brands has emerged that never existed before. Perhaps the real power of influential YouTube reviewers and unboxers is their ability to initiate this new conversation. However, it is up to the companies themselves to engage and react once the dialog starts flowing.

"We aren't shouting at our consumers," explains Hasbro's Lee. "In this day and age, brands don't drive brands, consumers drive brands."

This sea change is illustrated by the architecture of every YouTube posting. Although it is taken for granted now, the fact that each video page contains a comments section is telling.

"The difference between marketing now and marketing when I started 25 years ago is that now it's a two-way dialog," says Rosenberg. "When you put a product out there, you have to realize that it is the beginning of a conversation." He adds that successful brands are now learning to embrace the dialog, rather than cling to the notion that they must control every aspect of a brand's message. "You have to have a thick skin," he adds. "You have to realize that a few negative comments won't destroy your business."

DiBeradino says Spin Master has adopted methods to better participate in the emerging two-way discussion. "We do a great deal of social listening," she says. "We want to be able to react and know when opportunities present themselves."

There are many examples of how the new paradigm has already altered the toy landscape. For instance, Hasbro recently crowd-sourced new Monopoly pieces and added words to its Scrabble dictionary at the behest of vocal consumers.

A good illustration of both the power and unpredictability of this new landscape can be found in a simple uploading

accident on the Tech 4 Kids' YouTube page. "We mistakenly posted an [unfinished] ad online," recounts Pedersen. "All of sudden, we noticed that people really liked it and it really took off." The component that went viral was a spoken "squish, squish" sound bite being used as a placeholder in the ad until a slicker, more professional sound effect could be inserted in post-production. "It was a total mistake, but it was really compelling to the audience," he says. The video, posted in March 2013, now has more than 750,000 views with hundreds of associated comments. "We ended up utilizing some of the comments and incorporating them into our next marketing campaign," he adds.

There are a number of takeaways from Pedersen's story. First, there is no formula or metric that can predict what will resonate online. "If you look at the top 10 videos of 2014 on YouTube, you just can't put a line through all 10 and say what makes them work," says Hasbro's Lee. "Some are heavily produced, some are totally random. It's impossible to pin down."

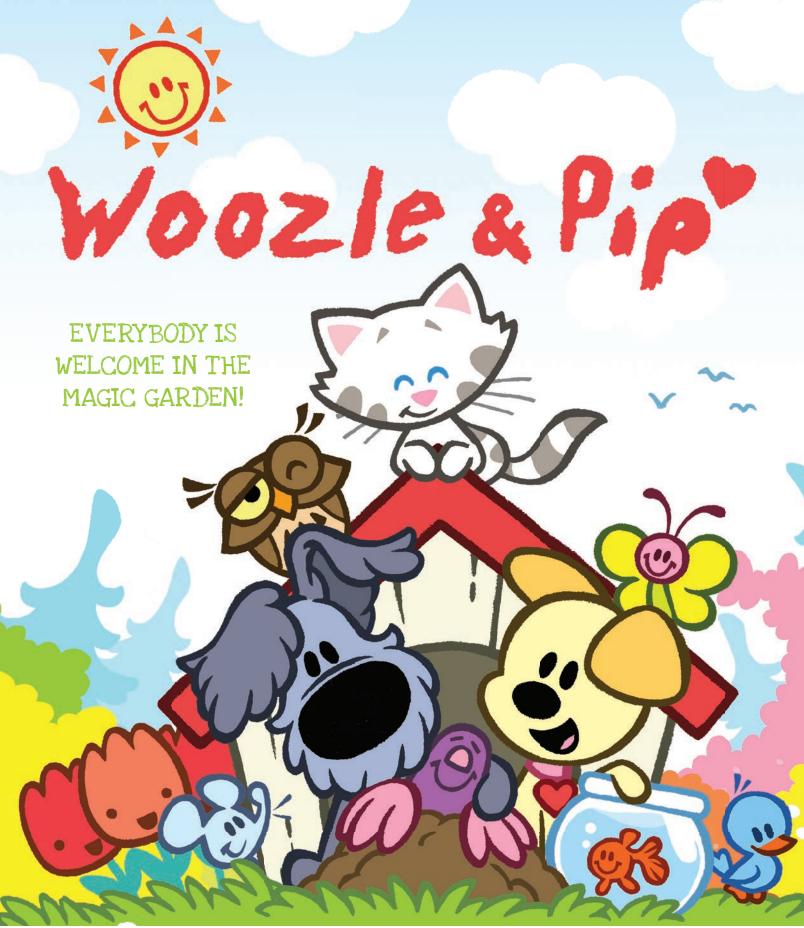
Second, brand owners can no longer expect to control their message, and perhaps more importantly, the way that the message is received. "There are a lot of touch points," says Rosenberg. "The way kids are interacting with them isn't in a straight line."

"Authenticity is a key word with these YouTube stars. The advertising piece is obscured because it is an authentic medium. If you make the message brandforward, you're going to miss out on something."

-Carol Spieckerman, retail analyst

**Retail extension** The industry is now left to ponder whether or not these new touch-points can be extended into the retail environment, and ultimately to product sales. Retailers are continuing to develop experiential formats to drive foot-traffic in their physical locations, so there does appear to be an opportunity to leverage this new consumer-led energy. Toys 'R' Us has been leading the way with its sponsorship of EvanTubeHD videos, indicating that the retailer is taking the power of this new platform to heart. Whether a more comprehensive integration is in the cards, though, is a matter of debate.

"Retailers usually have to make their plans 12 to 18 months in advance," says Silver. "How long are these kids going to last? On the internet, one day you're hot and the







next you're not." He posits that the biggest retailers will shy away from investing too deeply in the unboxer and reviewer tier of YouTube stardom because the currency of online popularity is too fickle to warrant the dedication of bricksand-mortar shelf space. "These kids are going to grow up, and then what?"

However, Spieckerman believes that retail has evolved into a far more nimble enterprise in just the last few years. "Maybe the traditional wisdom is that retailers are old and clunky and resistant to change," she says. "But they have become more agile. I would say it's more the rule than the exception to do short-term planning and develop quick, opportunistic relationships."



US retail giant Toys 'R' Us is currently tapping into EvanTubeHD's appeal, sponsoring a video series on the YouTube channel

Additionally, major retailers like Walmart are already heavily invested in the short-form video format along with other content plays. Spieckerman points to Walmart's extensive "Made in America" campaign and its localized price-comparison videos. "Walmart is doing an excellent job right now," she says. "People are engaged with its video content. It can be done on a shoestring budget, and the videos score real authenticity points."

She contends that retailers are searching for brand owners that are willing to complement the retailers' own content strategies. The biggest opportunity lies in creating a tighter connection between retailers, brands and online influencers. "Retailers are hungry for a plan that will connect these different touch points," she says. "It can be a fruitful extension for retail to tie in with well-known YouTube stars; to bring that environment where it has never been before."

For Maker Studios, a predominate gatekeeper of online power in the kids space, it's an intriguing proposition. "That would be great," says Pan. "Having a space in a toy store where people can see the content in real time. I think it would ultimately push more product." (3

#### The millionaire's club

Check out the top five toy review/unboxing YouTube channels by total subscribers

#### 3.5 million DC Toys Collector



#### 1.5 million BluCollection



#### 1.4 million DisneyCarToys

www.youtube.com/user/DisneyCarToys



#### 1.1 million EvanTubeHD

www.youtube.com/user/EvanTubeHD



#### 1.0 million Luck Penny Shop

www.youtube.com/user/luckypennyshop











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A coworker of mine always used to say I was a Sasquatch. They just think 'Wow what is this thing?' We have no idea what this is, but that just happened. We're not going to be as ham-fisted about it

as that. I still get emotional every time I read it to my kids.

- Mighty Yeti's 6-foot 5-inch tall co-founder **Josh Book** jokes about his inspiration for the studio name
- Book app marketing expert **Karen Robertson** notes that even now many parents don't know what a book app is
- CN's **Michael Ouweleen** recalls the mood in the room after Patrick McHale pitched *Over the Garden Wall* wearing a cape and cone-shaped hat
- Songster **Weird Al Yankovic** vows not to repeat the forced educational components of his first kids show on CBS in the '90s
- Amazon's Tara Sorensen on one of her favorite children's books, Shel Silverstein's The Giving Tree



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